



VTUBER LEGEND: HOW I WENT VIRAL

AFTER FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 4

AUTHOR: NANA NANATO ILLUSTRATOR: SIOKAZUNOKO

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FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 4

LIVE comment

SPIT IT OUT ALREADY!

¥-50,000

WELL GOOD FOR YOU

TEETEE

BREAK HER HORNS, SHUWA-CHAN!

SEI-SAMA? BLUSHING??

HUH?

SEI-SAMA BEING CUTE?
QUIT MESSING WITH US!

PIPIRU PIRU PIRU PIRU PIRU!

I KNOW YOU'RE LIVE BUT
CAN WE GET A RETAKE

CONGRATULATIONS!

Investigation
Awayuki x Sei
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#LiveOnPervSquad





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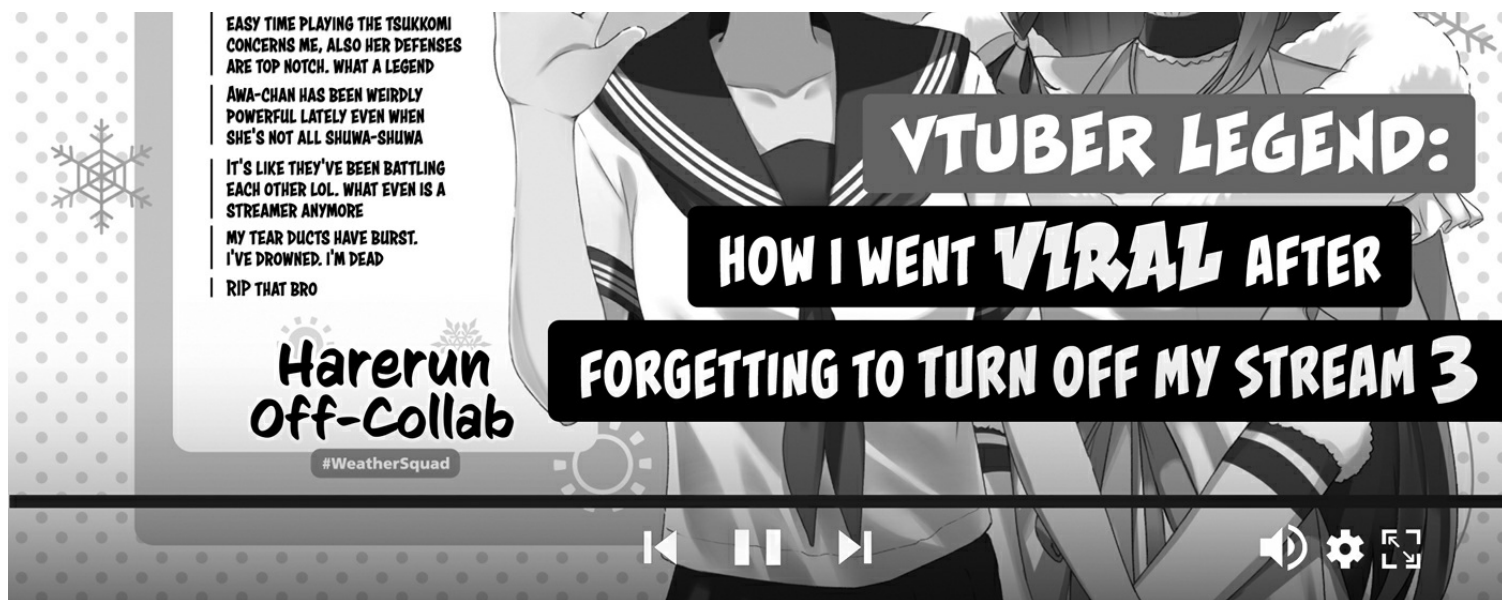
FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 4

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Story Summary

9,999,999 views • January 20, 2022

♥ 9999

💬 155



StroZero Clip ch
75K subscribers

Subscribed

Awayuki Kokorone finally decides to collab with her senpai idol Hareru Asagiri during the latter's live concert.

But that's where the going gets rough. To stand beside the proud **genius** Hareru, Awayuki must face **harsh trials**. And here, we shall describe the **path that she's walked**.

1. Went to a convenience store and successfully acquired 100,000 yen by purchasing **StroZero** and **stockings**.
2. Was requested by a company to do a sponsored stream for their game, then not only **came to the stream drunk**, but also called it a **shitty game**, and her quick wit led to wild success.
3. Let Hareru drive her home in a car.
4. Dragged the zookeeper down into a deep pit of terror and awakened the **new Boss**.
5. Had it both ways.
6. When her genmate was worried she lacked individuality, she solved the problem by turning her into a **voice sex illusionist**.
7. Ate yakiniku.

Having conquered **these seven trials**, Awayuki no longer has anything to fear. She proudly takes part in Hareru's concert and **defeats her senpai idol so hard** she sent her back to being a **newbie**.

Also the **red girl's monetization** disappears.



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Prologue

During my off-stream phone meeting with Suzuki-san, I brought up the Sei-sama matter right away. “Suzuki-san, have you heard about Sei-sama’s monetization being revoked?”

“Of course I have—it’s been the talk of the whole office lately.”

“How does it look?” I asked. “Will she get it back soon?”

“Mm...” she groaned in thought. “It’s embarrassing to say, but we just don’t know yet. Even Live-On isn’t that deeply connected to YouTube, after all. But we’re working with Sei-san to think of ways to get it back as soon as possible.”

Hmm, I thought. If they’re having to think of ways, they must not be sure what to do. I guess this is a first for Live-On, huh?

“Her streaming style is especially extreme,” she continued, “so she must have brushed up against one of YouTube’s guidelines. If she wants to discuss something with you, I’d like it if you supported her.”

“Naturally,” I said.

She laughed. “That was one cool answer. Sei-san really has been blessed with good friends. Shion-san in particular has been like a storm, wanting to get this resolved quickly.”

“Ah, sweet tee-tee to my ears.”

“It’s just...” She paused. “It seems like a rift of sorts is forming between the two of them.”

“A rift? What do you mean?”

Suzuki-san’s voice took on a worried color. “Shion-san is the type who prefers to act. Sei-san, however, doesn’t seem very enthusiastic about her efforts.”

“Really? Actually, now that you mention it, when I heard about all of this, I called her. She didn’t sound very out of sorts.”

“She’s been very noncommittal about the whole thing—like she’d love it if her monetization returned, but if not, then it would be no skin off her back... She’s just not the type of person who will voluntarily rely on others. She just sent a message to all the other Livers too, saying not to worry about her too much and to keep on streaming as usual.”

“Right... I mean, I’ll be worried about her regardless. But if she says so, maybe we really shouldn’t interfere too much.”

“Perhaps not... I believe we should watch and see for now. Her manager—they’ve been together for a long time—says she’s seemed hesitant and unsure about something, so if we make any sudden moves, we may make things worse.”

Unsure about something... I thought. At first, you might think that wasn’t like her. But I could understand taking her current attitude.

“Still,” Suzuki-san went on, sounding troubled, “we don’t know what Shion-san will do. Like I said, she views this as a major threat to her genmate.”

Those two had always seemed like such good friends. I was worried they’d end up having some sort of disagreement because of all this.

“I doubt much will come of it,” said Suzuki-san. “Nekoma-san is with them—she knows them much better than I do, and is better at handling the two of them. Still, you’re close with the two of them as well, right? I know I’m asking a lot, but if you could keep an eye out...”

“Oh, um, sure thing!”

“Thank you so much. Why don’t we discuss our own work now?”

The topic had me really concerned, but my own streaming activities had to proceed as normal. Managing to pull my mind away, I began discussing work-related matters with her.

Chapter 1

Worldcraft Stream 2

“Hmm...”

After my meeting with Suzuki-san, I found myself worrying about Sei-sama again, unable to concentrate much on other things.

I hadn't thought she'd get me this anxious, but for all she was essentially a dirty-joke bot, she was still my senpai who took good care of me all the time.

She has, hasn't she? I thought to myself. *Just recently, she helped me out with that Worldcraft project I proposed.*

I closed my eyes, recalling how that had gone. At the time, we'd never even imagined she'd have her monetization stripped away...

“Good evening, everyone. A nice, light snow is falling again tonight—which means this StroZero is freakin' *cold* today! *Pshhh!* Gulp, gulp, gulp, *puhaaah!* Flavor this good should be illegal! The tears, they won't stop... For real, if you told me I could get just one of these babies, I'd probably be willing to become a crazy exhibitionist for all of mankind!”

: Wasting no time faking us out, I see

: Your true self is showing

: omg her voice completely changed in the span of an instant lmao

: What should be illegal is how funny you are

: yamero with the whole squeezing lemon juice from your eyes thing

: Your heart is already on display for all of mankind,

you know

“All righty then! Today’s gonna be a *Worldcraft* stream, woohoo, woohoo, woohoo!”

Worldcraft was the name of a famous sandbox-style video game. I’d been pretty into it after first streaming it, and I still streamed myself playing it pretty often. Now that I’d experienced everything from mining to tree-cutting and even adventures, I had a good amount of the crafting materials and such forming the game’s foundation. So, compared to when I’d first started, I could now act with much more freedom.

And so! I thought. *This time, I’m going to have a different kind of fun than normal, woohoo!*

“And about what we’re doing,” I continued, “you’ll never believe it! But I, Shuwa-chan, have spearheaded a collaboration all by myself!”

: Ohhh?!

: **For real? That's kinda rare, isn't it? ¥2525**

: She participates in a lot of collabs, but I barely ever see her starting one herself

“Heh heh!” I sniffed proudly. “Well, I *have* started to feel like, if I’m the one pulling Live-On from the front, I’d better start acting like it! It’s time to put my leadership skills to the test!”

I’d chosen this game in particular for the collab because it was easier for a novice like me to put the collab together if I already had a framework to work with—*Worldcraft*—rather than needing to think it up from scratch. I’d figured it would be easy enough that even I’d be able to think of something fun and interesting.

: It's seriously crazy how Shuwa-chan has evolved past just being a clown

: She's getting more subscribers at a crazy pace too. people used to call her a one-hit wonder, but she's really not anymore huh

: A COLLAB!!! what are you doing in worldcraft?

: Maybe like that reality show where the guy goes into people's houses to find out what they're having for dinner and try to grab a bite? Except with StroZero flavor?

: oh, yeah, she'd definitely go right in and "eat dinner" hehehe

: And once again it all devolves to sex.

“Oh, you guys just laugh it up! But as the organizer, failure would be intolerable, so I thought of a real idea! Here’s the name: *Live-On Building Battle! Defeat the Master Builder Shuwa-chan!* Woohoo!”

Allow me to explain what this collab will entail!

In this game, you can freely construct buildings using a variety of blocks. But many times, different people will be able to create structures of vastly different quality. Why is that?

That’s right! Because of the absolute freedom you have, your creations inevitably reflect your architectural skills! Even experts who have been playing this game for years would lose to a newcomer with excellent design sense when it comes to building!

So, this collab will be a competition—me versus each of the other participating Livers—in a one-on-one building-quality contest!

Simply repeating the same thing for every match would be rather dull, so my idea was to have a specific theme for each round.

Will a Liver appear who can defeat me, the natural first-rate architect?

Now, I explained all that to the viewers, but...

: a natural first-rate architect! (of her own

destruction)

: Sorry, uh, I've watched all of Shuwa-chan's Worldcraft streams, but has she ever actually built anything?

: How rude! She's dug out caves, made little wooden shacks, and put up stone obstacles!

: PLEASE don't call that stone house she tried so hard on an "obstacle," for her sake ;_;

: her random lack of skill in weird places is hysterical actually

: That's what happens when you don't think about the design first...

: A lot of Livers are good builders, so I can see this going badly for her.

: If Harerun came, Shuwa-chan wouldn't be able to win even if there was 1000 of her

: is Harerun good at building?

: She's got crazy sense, speed, and scale. except she always accidentally dies during building and loses everything

: It gave me chills when she said she wanted to make a logo for herself, then cleared an entire chunk of the map and drew it on the ground

: All 1000 Shuwa-chans would be able to do is make 1000 obstacles

: maybe it would be a good barricade tho?

“Man, you guys are really having a good laugh there! At my expense! But today, you’ll be seeing Shuwa-chan when she’s serious, so get ready! Prepare to grovel at my feet! And, if I might be so bold, I’ve prepared restrictions and themes for this contest. I’ll send ’em all packing!”

: You'll have to build at truly ludicrous speed

: She's gone to plaid!

: holy shit what a blast from the past

: I see your strozero can is as big as mine. Now let's see how well you drink it.

: shit, I hate it when I get my "strozero" twisted

"A-Also, long stretches of building are going to get dull no matter what, so I'll be answering Castell's as I go. And actually, depending on how big we get with our themes, we may need to take the night for judging and then reveal the winners tomorrow!"

With that, it was time to put my back into this collab project! *I'm gonna make this fun for both the viewers and the Livers!*

"It looks like we're ready, so let's have our first would-be assassin enter the stage! Anyone with the talent and sense to defeat me...come out and face me!"

"Yahoo! The light of the festival is here for all to enjoy! It's me, Hikari Matsuri!"

"Are you sure you wanted to join this little shindig? I'm the type of person who would eat *anyone*, even her genmates!"

"Mrgh! I came to win too! You'd better be ready, Shuwa-chan!"

"Hikari-chan! Say that line more like you're a lady knight in a fantasy novel!"

"Huh? Umm... *I will never lose to the likes of you, scum!*"

"Ahaaahhh, I'm gonna beat heeerrr!!! When you say it like that, I want to get you to do the whole 'I'd rather die' thing, for reeeaaal!!! I'm not even fit to be near such a perfectly unyielding lady knight, ahhh!!!"

"Sh-Shuwa-chan? Why are you doing that weird thing with your voice?"

"'I'd rather die!' I want to see you do the 'I'd rather die' thing! Wait! But I want you to be happy too! Maybe it should be more like a heartwarming scene

where you say, 'I'd rather fry!' and then you fry up some delicious rice to eat! *You're* the shrimp who fried this rice all along?!"

"Shuwa-chan? Shuwa-chaaan!"

"Hikari-chan! Which would you rather—get messed up, or eat some fried rice?!"

"What kind of choice is that?!"

: ?

: yep, that's the booze talking for sure

: LMAO Hikari-chan has no idea what to do

: The meds don't seem to be working, so I'm upping your dosage, all right?

: I'd prefer Hikari-chan take the fried rice, that's just my preference tho

"AAnyway, let's wrap up the self-intros," I said. "It's time for Hikari-chan and me to have our build-off, but first, we'd like to announce the theme for the contest!"

"We came up with it together yesterday!" replied Hikari-chan. "The theme is: Thirty-Minute Build!"

"And that's pretty much the rule—we only have thirty minutes to see who can create a higher-quality building. Heh heh heh! If speed is the game, then I think I actually have a good chance of winning this."

"Thirty minutes is like one whole Dark Souls' worth of time! That's plenty for me!"

"The world doesn't need any more units of measurement, Hikari-chan. And the only people who can beat that game that quickly are total masochists."

While we chatted, we set up everything. We got far enough away from one another that we wouldn't be able to see each other's building, and we chose

open, flat areas to start on. The basic rules were these: we had no restrictions on materials or resources, we needed to go to bed right when night fell because enemies come out then, and any unfinished buildings when the timer ran out would be disqualified.

“Great! Awayuki is all finished with her prep, woohoo!”

“Yay! Hikari is all set over here too!”

“I’m going to start the timer. Three, two, one...”

“Begin building!” we both shouted.

As I hit the timer button, I knew I couldn’t waste time thinking too much. I had a very rough idea of what my building would look like at the end, so I started stacking blocks right away. With the theme being what it was, I’d be leaving Castella replies for my next match.

We both generally stayed in the call, but Hikari-chan kept making confused, worried noises; so, figuring she was doing some trial and error, I tried to make sure I didn’t bother her too much.

Hmm, I thought. I think this is good as the basic framework.

Oh, crap, I thought. Half the time is already gone? I’ll need to pick up the pace a bit. Making it look good won’t matter if I don’t actually finish the thing.

Hikari-chan seemed to be getting more and more focused as well. Her confused mutterings steadily faded, replaced with almost complete silence punctuated by the occasional “ohhh...” or “I see...” as she worked.

Eventually, the timer informed us that thirty minutes had elapsed—our time was up.

Yeah! I thought. I got it finished, at least!

“Hikari-chaaan!” I called. “We can start with mine. Would you come over here?”

“Oh! Sure thing!”

After meeting up with my fellow third-gen streamer, it was finally time for the viewers to judge our finished buildings.

“Okay, here we go...” I said. “Ta-dah!” At a distance, I aimed my camera at the building so that all of it would show up on my screen. *Witness the work of art I have created this day!*

Let’s see everyone’s reactions!

: The corners--they turn at perfect right angles! So sharp!

: She sacrificed elements of design to make it functional by using every bit of the space allotted!

: And the end result is....!

: a block of tofu

: it's tofu!

: Eh, it's got some weird thing on top, so it must be cold tofu, right?

: omg it IS a tofu topping!!!

Well, shit. “Ugh...” I groaned. “If only there was more time...”

“I think it’s nice!” insisted Hikari-chan. “I bet you could fit a lot of stuff in one of those! In fact, I’d like one for myself!”

“It’s fine, Hikari-chan. Stop being fancy and just call it a big warehouse...”

Urgh. Chat’s reaction was miserable. I lost for sure.

Or so I thought, anyway, feeling deflated. Then we moved over to *her* building.

“Huh?” But for some reason, I didn’t see anything like a building anywhere. There were just a few blocks here and there. *What’s going on?* “Umm, Hikari-chan? Where’s your building? Oh, wait, did you not come up with anything?”

“Well, Shuwa-chan, you see, I realized something.”

“Hm? What’d you realize?”

“That *true* survival is much harsher than all this.”

“Right. But, um, we were having a build-off.”

“True survival is so much more severe—even if you bring a few pieces of wood with you, it’s difficult. Hellish, even. Just creating a simple shelter could take *days*. Building a whole *house* in thirty minutes is impossible.”

“Aaand you’re not listening.”

“I want to test the limits of what I’m capable of! So...it’s time for me to hole up completely naked in the mountains for real!”

“Stop it! Get some help!”

: lmaoooo ¥1200

: Hikari-chan's madness is starting again...

: Wait, are you imitating that Ed guy from the Discovery Channel?

: wait for me, i'll get ready to go on this "survival" thing too

: You just want to see her in the nude

: He'd probably get eaten by feral Hikari-chan, since he'd be a valuable source of protein

It was time for the results! And, in a twist of fate, I won the match by default!

As I desperately tried to stop Hikari-chan from *actually* going out into the woods alone, I felt like I understood a little of the distress Shion-senpai regularly went through.

“Hey, Chami-chan? Thanks for coming today.”

“Oh, um, of course! Thank *you* for putting this together. It seems fun.”

“Really? Ha ha! It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy when you compliment me.”

“Umm, why have you been doing that hot-guy voice with all that sighing? It’s getting to me so much I won’t be able to focus on building…”

“Well, I just thought I’d give you a nice welcome, considering your voice fetish and all.”

“Awayuki-chan, you’re aware doing that will make me start wailing and obsessing in a really gross voice all stream, right?”

“It’s fine!”

“Is it?”

“Yep.”

“Ahhhhhhhhh!!! Awayuki-samaaa! More! Give me *more*! *Hee-heeeeen*! Whisper it in my ear so I can hear the very pulsings of your throat!”

“Oh, that *is* gross.”

“Awayuki-chan, if you’re going to use that sexy male voice, you can’t just drop it like that. It’ll make me very mad.”

“Wait, why are *you* the one getting mad at *me*?”

“Oh, you. If you do it any more, I might seriously swoon. Let’s move on to why we’re here, okay?”

“Whoops, my apologies. I was supposed to be developing the land, but instead I was developing my ears!”

: did i just hear chami-chan whinny?

: Hearing Chami-chama about to swoon is so gross and i love it sm

: just casually doing a sexy guy's voice XDDD

Alice Soma: I seriously swooned.

: oi.

Now, then! The second assassin sent for me was Chami-chan! And this time, the theme was “palace.” The time limit would be the start of my stream tomorrow, so we basically didn’t need to sweat over it. We could build to our heart’s content, and when we were happy with it, it was done. And then we’d present them during my stream tomorrow.

Since we didn’t have to worry about a strict time limit like with Hikari-chan, we carried on building at a very relaxed pace, chatting as we went. I doubted Chami-chan would end up losing by default because of a sudden onset of Live-On disease like Hikari-chan, so it was finally time to really enjoy this build-off!

“Phew,” I said. “That should do it for the foundation. Next I have to stack up all the blocks, which’ll be pretty simple. Hey, Chami-chan! If you don’t have to focus super hard right now, do you want to answer some Castellás with me?”

“Oh, certainly,” she replied. “This is going to take some time for me too, but it’ll be simple like yours.”

“Okay, *arigato*! Hmm, which one should I answer first... This one!”

Q: First the boss, then Chami-chan. It seems to me that Awa-chan has the talent to release other people’s fetishes.

I’d like to bestow the title “Instinct Release” upon you. Is that all right?

“Oh, that’s nice. What about ‘Fetish Domain Expansion’ too? Or maybe ‘Female Breathing Technique’ or ‘Pervert Activation Device.’”

“I’m getting worried someone might *actually* get mad at us.”

Q: The famous cuckoo haikus go like this:

Oda Nobunaga - If the cuckoo does not sing, kill it.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi - If the cuckoo does not sing, coax it.

Ieyasu Tokugawa - If the cuckoo does not sing, wait for it.

What about your version, Shuwa-chan?

"If the cuckoo does not sing, violate it!" I blurted out.

"I hate how I'm not bothered by this level of dirty joke anymore..."

"Now, listen as I imitate a cuckoo being violated! *Koo! Koo! Ahh! My koo-koo place is being kooked so haaard!!! Kook-kook-kook-kook-kook (moaning voice)!!!*"

," Chami-chan said.

"Heh. Nailed it."

"Oh! Uh, um, sorry! I think I fainted for a second out of pure shock. I have to hand it to you, Awayuki-chan. You always go above and beyond."

"Aw, you're makin' me blush. Chami-chan, what kind of cuckoo poem would you have?"

"Me? Hmm... *If the cuckoo does not sing, praise it until it does.* I guess?"

"Oh, hey, that's pretty good! And kinda fitting. I guess everyone's personality really comes out in it. Maybe I'll ask the other Livers too at some point."

: i lost at at kook-kook-kook-kook

: Every cuckoo in Japan is now considering fleeing the country

: Please, stop, Shuwa-chaaan! Your seiso points are already at zero as it is!

: oh. Oh, wait, she's seiso, isn't she? I legit forgot

: She's finally claimed dominion over the warring states of virtual comedians!

Q: How To Make Delicious StroZero

1. Prepare 1 Shuwa-chan wearing a sauna suit.
2. Make the Shuwa-chan drink StroZero, then have her exercise and sweat.
3. Collect the sweat, pour it into a can of StroZero, and drink it.
4. Delicious (Da-na-na-naaa!)

NOTE: All Shuwa-chans have gone through special training so that their sweat becomes StroZero. Please do not attempt to imitate this.

“It’s Elite StroZero! That’s an old meme, but it checks out!”

“Aren’t ‘elite’ and ‘StroZero’ antonyms?”

“Mrgh! Shuwa-chan is Upper Rank Zero—no doubt she’s elite, woohoo!”

“And just like that fanzine, you didn’t appear in the original work. Except in your case, it’s because you were so drunk you slept soundly until morning, then woke up and got turned to ash by the sunlight. Definitely an elite meme character, if you ask me.”

We eventually finished answering Castellás, and a few more hours passed. My building was starting to kind of look the part, but I was almost falling asleep at my computer. It was probably time to end the stream to let myself and everyone else sleep.

“Chami-chaaan?” I said. “How are things going?”

“Hmm... This will take a while longer. I’m going to keep at it for a bit, so you can go to bed now if you want.”

“Whoa, workin’ hard! Well, you don’t need to tell me twice. Time for me to hit the hay. My apologies...”

“No, it’s fine. I just want to keep going. Don’t worry about me—have a nice sleep!”

“Thanks! Anyway, tomorrow night, we’ll unveil the finished products...”

“Sounds good.” Chami-chan giggled. “You really do sound sleepy. Good night.”

“Night... *The oozing crest of corruption, the insolent vessel of madness, well up, deny, go numb, blink, disrupt sleep... The crawling princess of iron, the doll of mud eternally destroying itself, unite, revolt, be filled with earth and know your own impotence, Hadou number ninety—one kurohitsugi. The oozing crest of corruption, et cetera—two kurohitsugi. The oozing et cetera—three kurohitsugi...*”

“Ah. ‘Hitsugi’ as in ‘sheep.’ You have a really weird way of going to sleep.”

: The insolent vessel of madness (the aluminum can)

: The oozing crest of corruption (the 9% ABV label)

: The doll of mud eternally destroying itself (Shuwa-chan)

: Is this her new self-intro?

: disrupting sleep? i don't think she could BE anymore asleep

I almost actually fell asleep, but with a steel resolve, I shut down the stream properly and let myself be taken away to dreamland.

The next day...

“*Are wa dare da? Dare da? Dare da? Are wa Shuwa-chan da!* It’s me, Shuwa-chan! Time for another full-energy stream, woohoo! We’re gonna pick off where we left off yesterday, so let’s give Chami-chan a call!”

“Oh, hello, Awayuki-chan! I’ve been waiting! It’s finally time to reveal our buildings!”

“Um, yeah! It is?” *Wait, was Chami-chan always so excitable? Her voice sounds awfully enthusiastic compared to usual. What could have happened?*

“You sound excited, huh. Something happen?”

“Oh, why, do I?” She giggled. “I made something good, so I suppose I’ve been excited about that.”

“Which means you completed the building just fine?”

“Yep! And I did it so well, I’m proud to reveal it. I won’t let you down!”

Whoa! I can’t believe Chami-chan, the confidence-lacking poor communicator, would go that far. I should strap in for something crazy!

Obviously, I didn’t want to lose. But secretly, I was on the edge of my seat, wanting to see what she’d built.

Anyway, this took a whole day and night! Time for the unveilings! I’ll go first!

“Aaand... Here’s the palace I made!”

: Oh emm gee!

: That design, so angular, so sharp, so reminiscent of a gravestone!

: That appearance, just like a building in Tokyo that only considers fitting as much inside it as it possibly can!

: And the end result is....!

: A rectangular block of tofu

: it's a rectangular block of tofu!

: It's gigantic, but I'm not sure I'd call it a palace...

: I can see you really, really worked hard on it. But that actually just makes this even more sad.

: You did your best! I’m proud of you!

“Wait, why do I hear pity in your voices, chat? Pity can hurt more than just regular name-calling...”

“It’s okay, Awayuki-chan. If this were a Communist state, people would

definitely rate your functional building style really high!”

“Is that supposed to be a compliment?”

Ugh! Struck out again? Should I just admit it at this point? I’m a super shitty builder!

No, wait, it’s not over yet! I haven’t lost! I will keep on fighting until the very end!

“Then I guess it’s my turn next,” Chami-chan said.

“I’m prepared... Go ahead!”

“What I built...is this!”

“...Hm?”

Judging by Chami-chan’s motions, she was definitely referring to the building in the middle of my screen right now. But for some reason, the man-made structure looked—and I hated to compare it to this—like a public restroom at a park. It was just a super tiny little hut.

“Chami-chan, I, uh...”

She giggled. “Come inside.”

“Oh, um, okay.”

Apparently this little hut really was her finished product. Mystified, I entered, then noticed a single block missing from the floor, making a hole. *Is that...a ladder leading down?*

She giggled again. “Climb down.”

At this point, I’d realized the real deal had to be underground. But when I descended the ladder, what I saw betrayed every expectation—no, it went far, far beyond them.

Because she’d created an entire *world*.

I wasn’t exaggerating. Just like a snowfield, or a desert, or an ocean, there was a whole new world down here. Countless stone artifacts dotted the terrain down here, so precisely carved out of the underground blocks... I couldn’t believe how artistic they were. And, towering in the middle of it all, like a relic

of an ancient civilization, was a gigantic pillar monument.

What surprised me even *more* was how the space it had been built in was so vast, the game couldn't even render it all. I couldn't begin to imagine how deep it went.

So, yes, this was *an entire world*.

And if I had to call it something...

"An underground empire?!?!"

Yeah, I thought. That's what it is. No doubt about it.

"What the heck?! This is amazing! How'd you even make this?!"

"Hee hee hee! Well, once I got started, I just couldn't stop. I've been building until this exact moment!"

"What?! Wait, you mean ever since yesterday's stream?!"

"Yep! And I haven't gotten a wink of sleep."

Oh, I get it. No wonder she's been weirdly excited this whole time. She's right in the middle of that late-night hyperactive period!

"This is ridiculously huge..." I breathed. "Wait, can you even call this a palace, though?"

"Shut up!" she barked at me. "This is a palace to me! I created a living space in this underground empire for every single member of Live-On. This way, you can listen to people's conversations from underground, no matter where they are, and never have to actually meet anyone! It's modest living! The true Chami Isolation Dream!"

"No! Your plan was to wiretap the entire world?! That's not modest at all!"

: Kaiji-kun, Hanchou, your dreams have just come true

: I mean, those two weren't exactly trying to finish building the place...

: wait, she's been doing this ever since last night, all by herself...?

: The Dark World (literally)

“Chami-chan?”

“Hm? What is it?”

I had a whole heap of things I wanted to say to her, but for now, one thing stood out as especially important: “Get some sleep.”

As for the judgment—after a big debate in chat, we decided her creation was not a palace, so I won again!

Why the heck did I win twice, anyway? I thought, nevertheless really confused.

But anyway, after two consecutive wins, I’d next be facing off against the final assassin here to topple my master builder status. My results by themselves were stellar, since my opponents had both self-destructed; now I actually felt like going for the sweep.

“And now for the final assassin here to face me!” I announced. “Here she is...”

“Hey, sorry for making you wait. Did you wait? Anyway, it’s your girl, Seisama.”

“And, uh, *there* she is.”

“Ha ha! I slept in a little, so I didn’t have time to prepare. That’s why I’m naked.”

“Please go home.”

“*Welcome home*. See? You said you wanted a *welcome home* voice, so I gave you one as a gift—in my best sexy male voice. You are such a spoiled girl, aren’t you, Awayuki-kun?”

“Whoa. Crap. It’s a really good thing I busted up my eardrums last night already.”

“Then you’re accepting my voice even *deeper* into your body than your eardrums? Why, you cute little thing. You sure do know what to say to make a

lady happy.”

“She’s too strong. *I can’t beat her.*”

Once again, the final person to be helping me out with this collab was Sei-sama, in her usual fully naked skin. *I can’t afford to lose to someone like her*, I thought.

: Getting along great as usual! ¥30000

: Sex-sama absorbs all incoming attack types, so you can't damage her

: There she is (the pervert RL yuri devotee)

Sei-sama laughed. “Awayuki-kun, I must say, I’m impressed you managed to beat those two powerhouses to make it to me. And so, I have a proposition. Want to join forces? If you pledge allegiance to me, I’ll give you half of all the adult toys I have.”

“I have a feeling that would make my place into an adult shop, so no thanks. Also, I would have gotten to you anyway, even if I’d lost.”

“Oh, but don’t worry, they’re all used,” she assured me. “You could open an adult shop just for stuff I’ve already used.”

“I can’t think of a more sinful shop. The literal definition of shadowy business.”

“What the heck are you saying?”

“Ugh, I want to throw you away into the ocean.”

“Are you sure about that? I’d turn into Aquaman, you know. And then I’d shove Aquaman’s trident into my Aquamanko, pfft ha ha ha!!!”

“Stop getting off on the fluctuations in this conversation’s energy levels.”
Jeez, I thought. We’re gonna talk all day at this rate. I’ll have to force this back to the actual point.

As for the building theme this time, since this was the last one, we’d decided

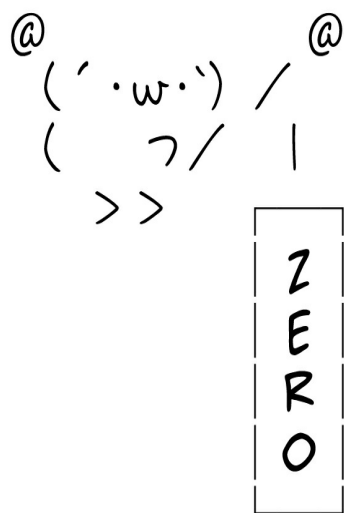
on a completely free build with no restrictions. And since we could build anything, this would demand a level of artistic sense beyond the first two matches.

But I'd actually already decided what to make. I was able to get a running start and begin building without hesitation. *One of those "move your body first, and your mind will catch up" sort of ideas.*

It was *quite* possible I'd create something...*incredible*.

Sei-sama seemed to be relaxed in her own building, as I'd expected. The unveiling at the end was shaping up to be quite the show.

For a while, we traded idle conversation here and there while focusing on our building. Eventually my eyes got a little tired, though, so I decided to read some Castellas.



"Right," I said. "This isn't even a sentence. It's just *art*. Pretty good art too, but how am I supposed to respond?"

"It's just like the anonymous phantom artist Banksy! How moving."

"Wait. Is there any chance Banksy *actually* sent this? Crap, it's getting me all excited!"

"What meaning could this artwork possibly have, I wonder... It'll require some thought."

: lmaooo a famous artist trying to spread the holy word of StroZero

: I, uh...I mean you're free to imagine whatever you want!

: they're being a little TOO free i think XDD

Q: Shuwa-chan, you're starting to become well-known as a lewd person.

So I have to ask, are you going to challenge Sei-sama for her title of Live-On's "The Lewd One" and try to attain both crowns: "The StroZero One" and "The Lewd One"?

“What do you think, Awayuki-kun?” she asked. “Feel like trying to take me down?”

“I mean, sure, whatever,” I replied noncommittally. “But how would we even compete for that one?”

“Great! It’s decided. We’re going to play shiritori now, but we’re only allowed to say dirty things. Whoever wins takes the crown.”

“Such a desecration of shiritori!”

“Anyway, I’ll go first. *Ochinchin.*”

“You ended it on the first turn!”

“Heh. I may have lost the game, but I protected my lewd name. Lost the battle, but won the war, right?”

“Somebody, please, save me.”

Q: Is Sei-sama always an uncontrolled fire hose of dirty jokes even off stream?

“I always pick the right time and place for it—it’s called etiquette. If you go

overboard with them, you could checkmate yourself in the game of life. Everyone should read the mood before using them!”

“Whoa. I didn’t expect you, of all people, to be talking about *etiquette*.”

“Exactly. It’s *because* I don’t usually comment on it that when I *do*, it’s way more of a turn-on!”

“So you’re just edging! That’s all you’re doing!”

: lolol the shiritori came and went so fast

: Shuwa-chan loves all the members so much, I love how she only gets super harsh with Sei-sama

: there's so much implication in that it sounds really really convincing

: Sei-sama is definitely the most Sex-sama

More time passed, until eventually it was night the next day. At last, it was time to reveal the final, completed buildings.

“Sei-sama, I’ve been unveiling my creations first. But would you mind if I presented second this time instead?”

“Hm? Why’s that?”

“Because I have absolute confidence. The star performer should always take the stage last, right?”

“Hmm... That’s big talk. All right, then. I’ll deal the first blow. But I’m pretty confident in what I made as well. Don’t come crying to me when you embarrass yourself at the very end.”

I laughed lowly. “Just try not to lose *too* badly.”

And so we moved to where Sei-sama’s finished building was.

...Yeah. We’re here. But, uh...

As the building—which I could only assume was her entry for the match—came into view, my feet began to refuse to continue onward. I was driven by a

sudden impulse to turn right around and run away.

“Look upon its glory!” shouted Sei-sama. “This is the greatest possible peni—I mean, work of art I am capable of creating!”

There it was, towering before me...erect before me? A monument stretching toward the heavens, its upper tip unnaturally larger than the rest of it—a stone object measuring about thirty meters tall.

Yeah. Right, uh, can I go now?

: No! No, you can't show that!!!

: She actually fucking did it...

: Wow, what a splendid adult matsutake that is!

: Oh? Hey, it's a Neo Armstrong Cyclone Jet Armstrong Cannon. And it's really high quality too.

: I thought she might do it, but I still can't believe she actually did...

: Shouldn't that be blurred out on stream...?

“You made a *dildo*?” I said in disbelief. “That’s *seriously* creepy, Sei-sama. Must we live in a world filled with such vulgar things? In fact, shouldn’t we just blow it up right now? You know, castrate it?”

“Now, hold on just a moment, Awayuki-kun,” she insisted. “It’s a little early to make judgments. Come right over here.”

“All right, all right.” Somehow managing to spur my leaden feet to move, I followed her to a single lever. It was attached to the aforementioned *thing* by some kind of wire or string... Was it a circuit? *Come to think of it, I’ve never used that stuff. But apparently you can get blocks to move if you hook everything up right.*

Wait! No, it can’t be—

“<Let’s OCHINCHIN Time!>” she exclaimed in an approximation of English.

Ker-clunk ker-clunk ker-clunk ker-clunk ker-clunk!!! When Sei-sama turned the lever, the giant member began to move around as if spasming!

“It wasn’t a dildo at all?!” I cried out. “It was a vibrator?!”

“Oh, so fantastic... No, I suppose I should call it *fannytaste-dick*.”

: OH MY GOD LMFAOOOOOO

: why is it so LOUD hahahah

: how is it wiggling around like that? it's so gross!
what kind of circuits did she even use

: fannytastedick! the kind of Japanese word that just makes you want to read it out loud

: but it's english!

: It's not really english

: Yeah, it's Eng-lewd

: I'm not sure which would be worse, saying that word to someone from the US or from Australia

: Congratu-vibrations!

Why did I even give her this theme? She's the one person I'd never want to give free rein to...

But there was no point in complaining. Sei-sama being on her usual shit had really gotten the better of me there, but it was finally *my* turn now. And once I showed my building off to everyone, they'd all forget about that strange thing that I wasn't even sure could be called a building.

All of you in chat calling me a tofu chef, you'd better peel your eyes for this one! This is my ultimate work of independent art, a result of my entire heart and soul!

: whaaaaat?!

: I... I can't believe what I'm seeing.

: This is... True to life.

: how can man get so close to the truth of the world?!

: This beautiful cylindrical form, utterly devoid of any angles at all, and the glaring, glowing decorations all around it!

: That lemon, dripping with juice, fit to make anyone's lips pucker without them realizing!

: And the end result is...!

: Wtf it's strozero!

: Lmaooo, they both went way too "free" with this theme

: You're telling me the person who was cringing so hard at Sei-sama's building made THIS instead?

: wait, that thing's enormous tho??? like, it's probably over sixty meters?

: The scariest thing is how quickly and confidently she built the thing. She did it all in a single night. It's insane

: She never even looked at a reference image once. I laughed so hard when she started saying "my body will tell me what it looks like"

: the strozero artisan

: She's gone from a tofu chef to a brewery owner

: I think we all know who won this one

: the level of quality on this is just nutso

"I pray that this world will have the blessing of StroZero."

"Whoa, crazy. It's a Neo ArmStroZero Cyclone Jet ArmStroZero Cannon. And

it's really high-quality too."

The results came in—by unanimous vote, I was the winner, and thus undefeated in this contest!

"I didn't think this was how reminiscing on the past was supposed to go."

As I opened my eyelids and returned from the world of the past, those were the first words out of my mouth.

Wait. Isn't reminiscing supposed to bring up more, like, really emotional events or whatever? That was just Sei-sama waltzing in totally naked at the end of the collab and rattling off dirty joke after dirty joke, acting like some kind of dangerous pervert on the street. Which is the same as she always is!

"...Actually, I guess that's why I'm thinking about it—*because* she was the same as usual."

The Sei-sama I knew was, to the very end, Sei-sama. She assumed an attitude of affectation as she dropped lewd joke bombs on her stream to make it fun. That was the only Sei-sama I knew.

So at this point, I had no idea what was going through her head. Sei-sama wasn't the same Sei-sama as the one I'd first seen anymore.

"Seriously. What's she even thinking?"

Despite saying that, all my collabs with her—including that *Worldcraft* one—had been so much fun. I hesitated to admit it, since I'd kind of fallen into a "bad friend" role with her, but she was one of the people who had first convinced me to join Live-On. And she'd taken really good care of me after I'd joined too. She was precious to me, and I wanted to see her usual glowing, unclouded smile.

"But there's just nothing I can do about this, huh...?"

Sei-sama didn't seem to want us to be overly concerned with this, so maybe the best option really was just to stream as usual and not do anything dumb unless she personally sent out an SOS.

"I guess the least I can do for her is shake it off, apply myself to my streaming, and come off as someone others can rely on."

Invigorating myself, I set to work making the thumbnail for today's stream.

Sleepover with Alice-chan

"Hm? Oh, almost there..."

I'd been enjoying the comfortable rocking of my Shinkansen seat and the drowsiness it induced while gazing idly at the outside scenery as it scrolled by like a busy stream chat, but it seemed the end was upon me.

Somehow forcing my heavy body to rise, I took my luggage and bid farewell to this dear, beloved convenience of modern civilization.

"The weather's so nice here," I remarked. I'd been worried at the scattered clouds in Tokyo, but the only thing in the wonderful, ocean-like sky now was the sun itself.

Now that I'd disembarked from the bullet train, it was time for another modern convenience—G-MAP. I looked up how to get to my destination, and then I was off; I simply had to follow the route it gave me. I gave thanks for being a modern woman with access to advanced technology.

With the open scenery here soothing my soul in a way Tokyo never could, I for some reason suddenly thought back on what had brought me here...

One night, after having a meeting with Suzuki-san, I'd been walking the talk, facing my computer while doing a video game stream. The game was one I'd started playing before the Sei-sama incident, and it was a really good one, to the point where I'd been doing solo streams for weeks now.

And on the glorious day I finally reached its ending, as I turned off the stream with a sense of satisfaction, basking in the afterglow of emotion...

".....Huh?"

That was when I realized something: my lifestyle had been *miserable* this week. I hadn't left home a single time in the past seven days, and without any shopping, I'd gone through every bit of food I had left. The number of interactions with other people I'd had was zero—and also, StroZero. I'd been

utterly isolated from society all week.

I can't let this go on, I thought. I beat that video game, so it's time to go hang out with someone and let my hair down.

"Oh, I know," I said to myself. This was a good opportunity, so maybe I'd invite Sei-sama to go out, off the record. Maybe, if I personally avoided talking about all the monetization stuff, it would be a good, refreshing change of pace for her.

So I sent Sei-sama a DM.

Awayuki Kokorone: Sei-sama, would you like to take a little time off and go out somewhere tomorrow? I haven't been outside all week and I feel like I'm going to dry up like a prune

A few minutes later, I got a response.

Sei Utsuki: By that, do you mean, "Oh, Sei-chan! You must really be having it rough... But it'll all be okay! I'll always be on your side, Sei-chan! I know! This is sudden, but what's your favorite food? Let's go get some of it to eat tomorrow! My treat, of course~♪ Let's stuff our faces with deliciousness and forget about all the bad stuff! And if you hang out with me, it'll be heaven for you, even in my bed, of course!"?

Awayuki Kokorone: Forget I asked. Go play at an amusement park by yourself or something.

Sei Utsuki: I'm kidding. Thanks for inviting me. Unfortunately, I'm booked all tomorrow with meetings about the incident and stuff like that. I probably won't have much time to hang for a few days. I'm really happy you thought of me, though.

Awayuki Kokorone: All right. I was serious about not having gone outside for a whole week, but please, don't worry about that!

Sei Utsuki: A whole week? You must be very pent up. You should use one of the other members to release all that.

Awayuki Kokorone: Phrasing...

Hmm, I thought. She turned me down. Though I couldn't blame her. I still needed to get out of the house, so maybe I'd ask in the Live-On group chat to see if anyone else wanted to go.

Awayuki Kokorone: Does anyone want to hang out soon? Not for work or anything. I can travel.

Alice Soma: Then please come to my house, ma'am!

I received that response in a mere four seconds. I wanted to retort that she had to have been waiting for it, but this *was* Alice-chan we were talking about—she wouldn't care.

And with that, I'd decided to hang out with her, since she was the first one who'd responded. Her home, though, was pretty far away, so we ended up planning a sleepover.

A sleepover at Alice-chan's house, huh...? I thought. Several things about that made me a little uneasy, but I was sure she was a good girl at heart. It would be fine. *Yes, I have faith it'll be fine.*

"Oh. Is this the place?" As I was walking and enjoying the scenery and the wind, before I knew it, I'd arrived at the single-family home displayed on G-MAP.

She did say she lived with her parents, didn't she? I reflected, feeling really grateful to them for letting this happen despite how sudden it was. But since I was sleeping over on a weekday, rather than a weekend, chances were I'd end up meeting them. That made me nervous. *Anyway, I'll text her to tell her I'm*

here.

Awayuki Kokorone: I'm here!

Alice Soma: Roger that! The door is unlocked, so please, enter at your leisure!

Guess she's ready for me, I thought.

Click, went the door.

Time to see what her house is like—

Bang, went the door.

The moment I'd opened it, my body had reflexively slammed it back shut before entering.

And then, at the speed of light, I called up my lovely angel. Naturally, unlike with a certain protagonist with a sister complex, she hadn't blocked my number.

♪♪♪♪

"Hello!" came the voice from the other end. "It's Mashiron! What's the matter, Awa-chan?"

"Mashiron? Hi, sorry for calling so suddenly. I'm actually here at Alice-chan's house to hang out with her."

"Oh, right, I think I saw you two chatting about that. Did something happen?"

"Well, I arrived a moment ago, and I just opened the door to her house. But then someone very strange appeared, so I'm at a loss for what to do."

"Someone very strange?"

"There was a pervert woman standing there in her underwear."

"Wait. For real?"

"Yes. And also, for some reason, she had a pair of panties pulled over her eyes, and then she was wearing her bra as a bottom instead."

“Uh. Whoa. That’s not just strange, that’s *insane*. Best thing to do would be to leave right now.”

“And also! One more thing! Since she wasn’t wearing a bra, she had empty cans of StroZero hanging by a string to cover her nipples.”

“Oh, I get it—that’s Alice-chan, isn’t it? I’m glad you’re so loved by others, Awa-chan.”

“Please, say it ain’t so, Maaashiii!”

“Wow, nobody’s called me that since Hareru-senpai.”

In any case, I hung up the phone for now and put my hand back on the door. *What was she talking about?* I wondered. *Even Alice-chan wouldn’t be acting like a crazy psycho version of Sei-sama. Sheesh. I can’t do much else, so I’ll just have to steel myself and figure out who the hell that pervert is for her. Wait for me, Alice-chan! I’ll clear your name, I promise!*

Click, went the door.

“<I’m a strong human. Aaaliice Alice! Aaaliice Alice! Aaaliice Alice!>”

“It can’t be!!!”

With the molester in front of me beginning to dance and sing in English as she introduced herself, my scream of agony echoed throughout the house’s front entrance...

“Hoo, haa... Hoo, haa...” Turning around, I took several deep breaths to try and keep mostly cool. I also closed the door again so that nobody outside would see what was happening for a few moments before finally turning back to face the chimera waiting in the house.

“Umm, you *are* Alice-chan, right?” I asked. “Because if not, I’m getting the heck out of here.”

“It’s me, ma’am! Alice Soma, reporting for duty! My heart bursts with gratitude for your having made this long, harrowing journey!”

“Oh. Okay, cool. I’m happy to see you too. But, umm... That, er, ‘outfit’? What’s that all about?”

I still couldn't look at her straight on, and the word "outfit" came out pretty awkwardly. *That's weird*, I thought. *There's a fully naked young woman right in front of me, and I'm not excited in the slightest. In fact, my brain and eyeballs are stubbornly refusing to even let her enter my field of view.* Oh, how nice it would have been if it were just embarrassment holding me back.

"Knowing you would be deigning to visit my humble abode, Awayuki-dono, I considered anything but the best garb to be a rudeness," she explained. "And so, after much thought, I decided on this!"

"I'd *really* like to know what was going on during all that thinking!"

"Yes, ma'am! First, I knew I would be proffering my own body to you, and that served as my starting point."

"Right. If I try to make any more witty retorts, this conversation will stall. So I'll hear you out in silence first."

"And, well, I am rather bashful, so I considered the possibility that with the one I adore so much actually in front of me, I would lose my speech faculties. Which is why I wanted a blindfold. Unfortunately, I couldn't cover my eyes well enough with my bra, so I thought, *Oh! I can just use my panties!*"

"...Right. Okay. And?"

"But that would expose everything below the waist, wouldn't it? Even I thought that would be going a tad too far, so I thought, *Oh! In the same way, I can put my bra on down there!*"

"Mm-hmm. I see. There's more, isn't there?"

"Yes, ma'am! And so then my boob area still needed coverage, which caused me no end of worry. But then I struck upon the idea of putting something there that would draw your attention and interest."

"Which was?"

"Well, I hooked some empty StroZero cans to a string."

"You hooked them to a string, and...?"

"And I hung them over my nipples!"

“Ohhh, I see. You hung them over your nipples. Yeah, just leaving your nipples hanging at that point would have been sacrilege.”

“That’s correct, ma’am!”

.....

“Are you brain-damaged?” I finally said after having desperately held in the urge for so, so long. *Oh, God, I thought. This girl is the craziest one out of all the crazies I’ve ever met. Take it from me.*

“Oh? Does my battle garb not tickle your fancy, ma’am?”

“No! And I’d like to know why you even thought to go with this. And you were definitely battling—not against me, though, but the world at large.”

“Mgh. I knew it. I’m too skinny, aren’t I? I’ll have to eat more and exercise more to train it up!”

“No, not that... You know what, could you just change into some normal clothes for the time being? You’re making it very difficult to look at you.”

“Because you’re turned on?”

“No, it’s because I’m in despair.”

“Mgh. I’ll be sure to drink plenty of milk starting tomorrow...”

“No, seriously, that’s not...” *I feel like I’m having culture shock right now—that’s how bad our mutual understanding is...*

“Anyway,” she said, “I have to go to my room for my clothes, so please come in for now.”

“Right...”

“Ahhh! She’s coming inside! Awayuki-dono is coming insiiide!”

“May I go home now?”

“No, ma’am.”

Reluctantly, I removed my shoes, then followed Alice-chan into the hallway as she lifted her head-panties time and time again to make sure she didn’t run into anything.

“My (clank) are in (clank) room right (clank).”

“Oh. You should hold the cans on your nipples still for a moment. I can’t make out what you’re saying with them clanking around every time you take a step.”

“Dear me. My apologies, ma’am. What I was saying was, my parents are in the living room right now. I know it may be a bother, but I’d appreciate it if you at least introduced yourselves to each other.”

“Huh? It’s past noon. Your parents are still here?”

“Yes, ma’am. I was surprised as well, but they were so pumped up about an important guest coming that they took the day off from work.”

“You’re kidding...” Yikes. I’m nervous now—I’m not used to this stuff! This is the first time I’ve ever met another Live-On member’s parents.

And also! If they’re here, I wish they’d put a stop to their daughter’s tomfoolery! None of this must make sense to them!

Actually, wait a moment. If the daughter is like that, then does that mean the parents are—

“This is the living room, ma’am,” said Alice-chan. “It’s a bit of a mess, though, having been lived in as much as it has.”

“Gulp...”

Alice-chan opened the door without hesitation. “Mooom! Daaad! The guest’s heeere!”

“P-Please excuse the intrusion! Thank you so much for letting me... Uh...”

I’d rallied my courage and set forth onto this final battlefield, only to end up making a weird, dumb noise like that—though I wasn’t shocked like I’d been with Alice-chan.

Her parents were the reason for it, of course—they were standing tall and proud, their eyes closed. But it was like, well... If I really had to put a word to it... Right. The sight before me was utterly *inconsistent*.

While the living room had a Western style, the woman, presumably the mother, for some reason held a folding fan in one hand and wore an extremely

gaudy red kimono. And the man, presumably the father, for some reason had a headband around his head and a stomach band around his stomach.

And the *strangest* thing was the fancy mallet her father was holding. And in the middle of the two of them was a mortar.

Were those *mochi-pounding tools*?

But without paying attention to how much I was frantically searching for my next words, both their eyes suddenly opened with a flash!

“Ten-te-ke-ten-ten-teten-teten-ten, ten-te-ke-ten-ten-teten-teten-ten! Just wheeen our daaughter had becoome aaa VTuber, she tuuurned out to be a StroZero aaaddict!” her mother sang in a traditional style.

“Say whaaat?! They’ve really done it now! Men should be quiet,” her father interjected.

“SHIIIIIT!!!” her mother screamed.

Wshh! Tap tap tap tap! ♪ ♪

I turned around and, once again at the speed of light, called up Mashiron.

“Oh, hello,” she said. “It’s me. You know, me! What’s up? Feeling like lending me some money?”

“A reverse scam call? That’s new, Mashiron.”

“Heh heh. I just wanted to joke around a little. Did something else happen, Awa-chan?”

“Oh, yes. Well, I’m currently meeting Alice-chan’s parents.”

“Wait, really? Sounds nerve-racking. Try not to do anything rude.”

“No, that’s not the issue. Her parents, for some reason, turned into Dayu Koume and that guy from Coolpoko who shouts a lot!”

“I’m sorry? Wait, what is going on over there? Are you at an ice rink right now? You sound like your sanity is slipping away.”

“And also, they’re totally out of sync and the punch line is failing hard!”

“Well, I’d be more surprised if they were in sync. Especially the Koume.”

“This is crazy! It’s like a dream team! I’m on the edge of my seat!”

“Yep. Definitely a dream team. One I’d prefer to stay in my dreams.”

“Don’t make fun of Dayu Koume plus Coolpoko! I’m a huge fan of them!”

“Where is this single-minded devotion coming from, Awa-chan? I guess you’ve always been a fan of one-shot gags like that, though.”

Phew, I thought. I’m feeling calmer now after borrowing Mashiron’s strength.
And with that... “Hey, Mashiron?” I said.

“Hm? What?”

“Save me?”

“Good luck.”

“Nooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!”

Without a single shred of mercy, she hung up the phone, plunging me back into the maelstrom of chaos. *Damn you, Mashiron! I’m gonna stuff myself with so much good food that I won’t even be able to eat anymore! That’ll teach you!*

“And these are my quarters! Please make yourself at ease!”

“Right. Thanks.”

Once I was finished exchanging hellos with her parents, Alice-chan showed me to her room, where it seemed I’d finally be able to take a breather. After that first contact with her mom and dad, our introductions had gone unimaginably smoothly and ordinarily. Following their joke, the moment they began talking with me, they transformed into regular, good parents that you would never expect that other stuff from.

It seriously made me jump out of my skin, I thought. I didn’t even have time to make any witty retorts before they started very politely introducing themselves, still wearing those...uh, entertainment costumes. It felt so out of place, my brain was working overtime trying to put it all together. What the hell was all that...?

They definitely weren’t the type of people who were easy to deal with. I asked Alice-chan about it too—apparently their performance was a sort of

everyday affair. *In short, this family's nutso. They seem like they get along really well, and I bet it's a fun family to be a part of. It's just their quirks...*

In any case, I shook off the thoughts, deciding to enjoy my time with Alice-chan. *As for her room... It looks surprisingly normal, huh? Like a regular girl's room.*

"It's embarrassing having you stare at my room that much..."

"Oh, uh, I'm sorry!"

"It's okay. There's really not anything to see here, though."

"Yeah. I'm kinda surprised, honestly. I was prepared to see pictures of me plastered all over the walls."

"Oh, that's over in the hobby room."

"....."

I should have just let sleeping dogs lie, I thought. Time to erase that from my memory...

After coming to Alice-chan's room and taking a seat on a cushion, I knew what my next course of action had to be. And yes—it did involve her clothes, which stood in direct opposition to just about every single ethic and value of modern society. If she stayed like that, I'd be overcome with an indescribable danger at all times, so I needed her to get changed right now. It felt like a visceral rejection from deep in my unconscious mind—not quite the same as Japanese horror, but a new genre altogether: strong horror, I'll call it.

"Only you can prevent forest fires! Just two StroZero cans is all it takes to start one! (clank)"

"Forget it, Alice. Words like that will work on me... Er, no, quit horsing around and get changed already!!!"

Once it seemed like she'd changed into regular clothing, I finally turned my permanently averted gaze back to her. *Hmm. Yes, I see...* "Okay. Good, good. You put on actual clothes. I'm proud of you."

"Really?! Eheh heh, she gave me a compliment! Is this outfit properly cute, ma'am?"

“Yes, I think it’s very cute and girly. But enough about the clothes. What’s that you’re still wearing on your head?”

“A hat, ma’am.”

“(≡ω≡)”

“Panties, ma’am.”

“Very good.”

While Alice-chan had changed into real clothes, she’d resolutely kept her panties on her head; they were still pulled down over her eyes.

“You have *got* to realize that’s a weird thing to do!” I exclaimed. “Do you *always* wear panties on your head at home?”

“If they were your panties, Awayuki-dono, I’d gladly wear them at all hours of the day—so please give me the ones you’re wearing now!”

“How can you think of pestering me in this situation?! Why would I ever give them to you anyway?!”

“I’ll take very good care of them, ma’am. I will be sure never to wash them.”

“*That’s* taking care of them...?”

She stubbornly refused to take the panties off. Eventually, an idea popped up in the back of my mind: What if she had a reason for keeping them on? Suddenly, I felt bad for trying to force the issue, and for a few seconds, I wondered what to do, troubled.

Eventually, Alice-chan—unable to just watch me like that—began to explain her reasoning. “Um, like I said at the front door, I’m actually a very shy person. I don’t think I’d be able to make eye contact while talking...”

“O-Oh. I figured that was all part of the big joke you played on me. But the shyness part was accurate, huh?”

“Yes, ma’am, though I’m embarrassed to admit it. And to tell the truth, the act I put on as Alice Soma is because I’m too shy to speak very well if I fully act like myself. Er, ma’am.”

“Oh, yeah, you’ve been talking the exact same way as when you stream!” My

impression of Alice-chan as a character was so strong that I hadn't thought anything was wrong with it until just now. But we were together physically, offline and off stream. *Meaning this was all a big plan to let her actually have a conversation with me*, I thought, beginning to feel a little bad for her... Like, I don't know, she was cute somehow... *A-Actually, her motives are cute at least! Though visually...yeah.*

"Anyway," she finished, "that's why I'm wearing the panties on my head."

"I understand," I replied. "It's just that it puts a weird pressure on me, you know? Having a pervert Kamen form here with me at all times, that is. Maybe you should try taking them off, just as a test. I'm not scary, I promise."

She moaned. "You won't think I'm a boring woman who can't make eye contact or carry on a conversation, will you?"

"Of course not. I doubt anyone you respect as much as you do would be so narrow-minded. Okay? Come here."

"Yes, ma'am..."

Unsure and reluctant, Alice-chan nevertheless fell to my persuasion and finally pulled the panties off her head. And then, for the first time, we actually saw each other's faces.

But after our eyes met for barely an instant, she covered her face in both hands, fell over backward, and began to writhe.

"Wh-What's wrong?!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, no, I've seen it... I've finally seen Awayuki-dono's honorable countenance!"

"Honorable what?"

"It's too sublime! Too holy! It's blinding!!!"

"I think you're exaggerating—"

She cut me off with another groan, then started to flail around on the floor a little instead of getting back up.

This is... How do I put it? She's got a normal cute side to her. She constantly

caught me off guard with most things she did, which definitely made her fit right in with Live-On's members. But this finally reminded me of the fact that at heart, she was a kouhai who looked up to and admired me.

I'd only seen her face for a moment, and even then only gotten a glimpse of an anxious expression, but her features reminded me of a cute little sister—which was a *massive* difference from how she acted on stream. I was pretty sure she was a reserved person who could lay herself bare as long as she had a mask on.

“Look, just take a deep breath, okay?” I said soothingly. “Oh, and now that I think of it, do you want to tell me your real name? We're finally seeing each other offline, so maybe we should do reintroductions.”

“Oh. Umm. My name is Ayumi Itsukushima...”

“Ayumi-chan? Okay! I'm Yuki Tanaka. It's nice to remeet you.”

“She... She called me by my name... My *real* name...”

She was calmer than before now, but she still glanced around anxiously, muttering the words “Yuki-senpai” under her breath over and over again. When our eyes happened to suddenly meet, her face went totally red and she looked down.

Who is this person even? She's so...so...so...

“So cuuute!!!”

“A-Awayuki-dono?! Hyaaa?!”

Without thinking, I leaped at the little cluster of everything cute and sweet and hugged her. I went a little too hard, though, and ended up pushing her down.

“I can't believe you're this pure in real life! The gap moe is just too much! It's unfair! C'mere!!!”

“Ahh, I, um, wait, I, ahh?!”

Just as I was letting my emotions run away with me and putting my hands all over Alice-chan's back and the back of her head, it happened.

“Hey, you two! Mommy did her best and baked some sweets! If you’d like some—oh, *my!*”

Alice-chan’s mother, carrying a tray of deliciously smelling cookies and juice, came into the room.

Hang on, I thought. With the position we’re in... Was this a bad time for her to see us?

“Oh, my! I suppose dinner tonight will be a heaping helping of the Pill!”

“No, no, no, not the pill!” I cried. “Never in history has there been such a crazy dinner!”

“That’s not it, Mom!” exclaimed Alice-chan. “If I had a chance at Awayuki-dono’s seed, I’d *want* it to hit its mark!”

“No, you’re getting it wrong!!!”

And so, as I got off of Alice-chan, I was the one who had to defend myself to her mother.

“Ah, Alice-chan, that spot... That feels good!”

“Right here? You like it right here, ma’am? Hee hee. I’m quickly starting to learn where your weak spots are, Awayuki-dono.”

“Haah... Haah... It feels so good I can barely move now...”

“Good! Very good, Awayuki-dono! Just relax and give yourself to me. Next, open your legs! I have a *special* sexual course that will make you feel even better.”

“Oh, no thanks.”

“Pff.”

Several minutes after her mother’s attack, I was lying facedown on Alice-chan’s bed, with her straddling my waist. We weren’t doing anything shameful, of course. We’d been talking about what we could do, she’d offered to give me a massage, and I’d accepted—that was all. Naturally, our clothes were all on.

“Mm... You were right. The massage definitely felt great. But you really don’t

need to go through all this trouble for me. I know you want to have fun too.”

“I’m perfectly fine, ma’am! In acknowledgment of your service, I want to soothe your body and soul both. And you *were* really stiff, you know. You tend to be too strict with yourself about streaming.”

“Thanks. Yes, I do have to be in front of the computer at all times. I guess humans really do have to exercise... Hee hee. Then again, if your massages feel this good, I wouldn’t mind letting a few knots form when I’m with you. This has been heavenly.”

“...Does that mean you’d let your body be stiff and erect in my presence as a substitute for the male organ? Are you seducing me? Should I remove my clothes?”

“Oh, no thanks.” *So much for being serious, I guess!* I thought.

Alice-chan had ended up remaining in her streamer persona in order to handle me, though she wasn’t covering her eyes anymore. It seemed to be the best, smoothest way for us to communicate with each other.

“It wasn’t just your shoulders that had knots in them,” she commented. “You might not have very good lymph flow right now.”

“Lymph flow?” I repeated.

“Yes, ma’am. So I’ll have to get your lymph flowing again. I’m removing your clothes now!”

“Oh, no thanks.”

“Mgh. But why? I’m pretty sure a lymph massage would feel really nice.”

“It’s not about the lymph massage. It’s about the instinctive danger I feel with you as the masseuse.”

Brushing off her normally extreme...love, let’s call it, I still really enjoyed the skillful massage. By the time it was over, my body was shockingly light. Physical exhaustion put a lot more of a burden on me than I’d thought. *I’ll have to look for a good massage therapist or chiropractor near where I live.*

Aaanyway, I thought, *next up is, of course...* “Okay, Alice-chan, your turn to lie down.”

“Wait, me, ma’am? I don’t need one...”

“What are you saying? You’ve been doing the same streaming work as I have. You should get a massage too.”

“But this is in acknowledgment of your service. I can’t possibly put that kind of —”

“Look, I never said I was here to be acknowledged or whatever... It’ll be fine. I’m doing it because I want to. It may not be very good, but I won’t hurt you, at least.”

“Hrmmm...”

Even then, Alice-chan didn’t seem quite convinced. I was quickly realizing that she had one of those personalities that had trouble going against anything she’d already decided on.

Hmm. Let’s see. “In that case,” I said, “should we play a game while I give you the massage?”

“A game, ma’am?” she repeated.

“Yes! See? You’ll feel a lot less stiff and tired, and I’ll have fun too. It’s a win-win!”

“I... I suppose so. Oh, but still—”

“No buts, no stills! Just lie down, okay? Come on!”

“O-Okay.”

I had to partly force her into place, but I eventually got her into a massage position. *Yeah, it looks like she has a lot of pent-up exhaustion too,* I thought. *Maybe not as much as me, but let’s get those knots out.*

“Ahh, that feels very nice, ma’am...”

“Does it? I’m glad to hear it. It’s been a really long time since I’ve given anyone a massage,” I told her.

“It’s putting me right to sleep for sure... Wait, what about that game you mentioned? I feel like there isn’t much we can do in the position we’re in.”

“Oh, uh...” *Crap. I just sort of said it, but I hadn’t actually thought of anything.*

I needed an idea. Any idea... *Oh, I know!* “Why, today is April Fools’ Day, isn’t it?”

“Huh? No, ma’am, today is definitely not April Fools’ Day.”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff! Any day can be April Fools’ Day if we want it to be! I know some people who were *really* wiggin’ out who had a second April Fools’ Day in a year, so there’s no problem at all!”

“I, er, I see! Understood, ma’am!”

“And so, in the spirit of April Fools’, would you like to play a lie-detecting game?”

“What kind of game is that?”

The impromptu game I’d thought up had very simple rules. One person asked the question, and the other attempted to guess the answer. The questioner would give the answerer one truthful statement and several lies; the answerer would have to pick out the truthful statement. It was a vaguely familiar game.

“I see,” Alice-chan said after I explained it. “I understand fully, ma’am. May I be the first questioner?”

“Sure, go right ahead!” I said.

“Okay, then. I’ll give you three statements, so try and guess which one is true!”

“Bring it on!”

“One—while I was massaging you, I was secretly XXXXing. Two—I intend to imprison you here so that you never leave this house again for the rest of your life. Three—I’m not actually Alice Soma, but a regular person.”

“Oh God, I really hope all three of those are lies!!!” No matter what the truth was, this girl was doing some crazy shit without me knowing! Wait. No! I didn’t want to know the right answer! We should never have played this game! *No time to think; I’ve gotta run away!*

“Actually, they *were* all lies.”

“...Huh?”

I'd been completely at a loss, my mind racing with anxiety and worry, when Alice-chan had said that as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Aha ha," she laughed. "You said it was April Fools' today, didn't you, Awayuki-dono? So I lied. Having a truthful statement in there *was* the lie!"

.....

"Wh-Why you!!!"

"Eek!!! H-Hey, that tickles!!!"

Finally realizing how she'd tricked me, I—still straddling her—got my revenge by inflicting a tickling attack on her. Eventually her clothes got a little messed up, so I decided to leave it at that. And then it happened.

"Heeey, you two! Mom wants to know what you want for dinner—ohhh?"

With the worst possible timing, her father opened the door to the room. Reflected in his eyes was the scene of me straddling her daughter—disheveled clothes, out of breath, all of it.

Hang on, I thought. *This is—*

"Honeeey! Contact every obstetrician in the prefecture! A new life is going to be born!"

—totally déjà vu!!!

"Haaahhh..."

I stretched my legs, soaking in a bathtub a good bit larger than the one in my apartment, a moan escaping my lips that betrayed a level of enervation beyond my years. It was bath time—and it was heaven.

I was borrowing the bathroom at Alice-chan's house at the moment, but it crossed my mind that big tubs like this were the granddaddy of all the modern luxuries that everyone these days insisted were ruining people. In a flash, the strength left my body, ascending with the steam from the water. I had reverted to an invertebrate. Backbone: gone.

In any event, the plan was to spend this time at her house today. Then,

tomorrow, we'd go out and visit some places in the area, and when the sun began to set, I'd be going back on the Shinkansen.

Well, still, though, I thought. *It's around ten PM right now, but so much weird, unexpected stuff has happened to me that probably could have only happened at Alice-chan's house.* My mind turned to the dinner we'd eaten earlier, after I'd finished giving Alice-chan her massage.

The idea of intruding at a nice, happy family's table naturally made me nervous. But when I took some of the delicious-looking steak her mother had made—only one of several dishes she'd served—I almost spat the whole thing out as soon as I put the first bite in my mouth.

It wasn't because it was *bad* or anything like that. In fact, even my novice palate could tell the flavor was *incredible*, and not something you'd ever have expected from home cooking.

It was just that... Well, the appearance and the flavor didn't match. Whatsoever.

As I'd brought it up to my mouth, it had been a steak. But what filled my mouth was not meaty umami, but an intense sweetness.

I hadn't known for sure, but it seemed the dish had only been a steak on the outside. On the inside, it had been a chocolate cake—a Sacher torte made to *look* like a steak. There had also been a steak made to look like a chocolate cake. As someone who lived for and by entertainment, their dedication to not only their craft, but to intricate jokes, was more than enough to impress me.

Judging by how neither Alice-chan nor her father had reacted very much to it, I guessed that their family was never satisfied unless they had some kind of practical joke in *everything*.

I remembered seeing a comment on one of her previous streams demanding to know if her entire family was Live-On. Apparently, the answer was yes.

But I hadn't spent all this time sitting on my laurels either. To counter the insanity, while I rested in the tub, I kept an eye and ear out for anything that might seem the least bit out of place. And there was one question in particular I'd had before getting in. *Wait, Alice-chan's not with me?*

She was not.

Surprisingly, she'd personally declined, insisting that my naked body was too sacred to be sinfully sullied by her gaze or something.

This was Alice-chan we were talking about, though. Normally she was super aggressive, but today I'd found out she was shy about the strangest things. But while that shyness was perhaps part of her true personality, I couldn't let down my guard. I needed to keep watch on every possible entrance to guard against an infiltration.

".....Huh?!"

I think I just heard a quiet sound from the changing room! I thought.

...Yeah, no doubt about it. Someone's in here.

Hee hee. You've got a long way to go, Alice-chan. My prediction was correct—I was one step ahead of you.

Enter if you dare! I'll defuse any excitement with a cold-blooded attitude!

"Haaahhh! Drawn here by Awayuki-chan's young, naked body, it is I, Mrs. Alice!!!"

"I got the wrong person?!" I couldn't help but cry out. I certainly hadn't expected her *mother*, clad in only a towel, to show up.

Oh, and she *did* really just intend it as a little joke. She never actually entered the bathroom, and just left like a normal person...

Despite the prank, the bath itself still did a good job of gently melting away all the day's weariness. After getting out and changing into my pajamas, I headed back to Alice-chan's room, feeling an indescribable listlessness as the heat in my body cooled down. The languid sensation was making me *really* nice and sleepy.

"Oh! Welcome back, Awayuki-dono!"

"Thanks. And thanks for letting me use the bath. It was so nice I almost wish I could live in there from now on."

"I am happy to hear it, ma'am! And I've laid out a futon for you as well. You

told me you didn't care where I put it, so I chose the most optimal place!"

Oh, yeah, I thought. We were talking about that before my bath. We'd been trying to determine the sleeping layout, and since she had her own bed, I'd told her I could just sleep on the floor or even on the sofa in the living room—it didn't matter to me. The fact that she'd set out a futon despite how abrupt my visit was made me thankful beyond words. So I gave her a simple "thank you so much," then looked over at her as I finished drying my hair, and—

"Come, Awayuki-dono! Quickly—there's no time to waste!"

".....Oh. I see."

It took a few seconds of loading time for me to grasp the layout of the room, but eventually I did come to a conclusion.

I'm actually pretty proud of myself for dealing with it so calmly, I thought. If I hadn't built up my resistance to this, I'd have yelled the best retort I could come up with.

There was indeed a futon laid out for me.....but it was on Alice-chan's bed.

To put it more simply, the layers went like this:

Alice-chan's bed

Alice-chan's blanket

My futon

My futon's blanket

I had told her I didn't care where she put it, but I hadn't expected this... And if she wanted to sleep together, she could have just said so instead of being so roundabout with it.

Obviously I'd crush her under my body weight if we arranged ourselves like that, so after Alice-chan went to take her bath, we decided to sleep in the bed together like normal people.

"What a blessed development..." breathed Alice-chan. "This is truly *Alice in Wonderland!*"

"Yeah, yeah. Let's just get some sleep for tomorrow, okay?"

“Zzz... Zzz...”

I woke up suddenly, then saw Alice-chan in front of me comfortably asleep, her breathing regular.

It was a little past midnight; apparently I’d fallen asleep, then woken up an hour or two later. Was it because I was sleeping somewhere other than I usually did? Maybe my body wasn’t used to the sleeping environment yet.

I was still sleepy, though, so I expected I’d be able to fall back asleep if I closed my eyes. However, my throat was pretty dry.

...Okay, I’ll just go get a glass of water and then come back. It’s gonna bother me too much to sleep well at this point.

I quietly slipped out of bed so as not to wake Alice-chan up and left the room.

“Oh?”

“Eep?!”

As I was heading down the first-floor hallway to the kitchen, I suddenly heard a voice come from behind me.

The lights were all out in the hallway, and it was dark, so I’d made an uncharacteristic yelp. But when I turned around, I saw Alice-chan’s mother standing there in her pajamas.

“O-Oh. It was just you,” I said.

“It was. What are you doing up? Can’t get to sleep?”

“No, I was thirsty, so I wanted to get some water if I could. Are you just going to sleep now?”

“That’s right. My husband is already asleep, though.”

“I see...”

The conversation petered out. As it started to get weirdly awkward, her mother appeared to think for a moment, then said, “Oh, I know! Why don’t we talk a little before going back to sleep?”

“Talk?” I said. “About what?”

“Oh, nothing much. It won’t take long. You can have your water as we talk!”

“Sure, then. I don’t mind.”

We sat down across from each other at the table we’d eaten dinner at, our drinks in front of us.

And the first thing she talked about were parental concerns. “As for what I wanted to talk about,” said Alice-chan’s mother, “I’ve been wondering if Ayumi is doing well. I know I’m one to talk, but she’s a bit of an oddball, isn’t she? I was just wondering if she was acclimating well.”

Her expression and her tone—they were definitely those of a parent worried about her child. Despite how eccentric she was, I was sure she loved Alice-chan a lot.

“I don’t think there’re any issues at the moment,” I told her. “She’s in the fourth generation, so I don’t know *everything* that’s going on with her. But I’ve never heard about her causing any problems.”

“Really? Oh, that’s good to hear! She does take after us, so she’s like a boundless well of energy. And I think that’s adorable and lovable, but she tends to chase after things to fill her heart with, never quite satisfied with what she has.”

“That...well. That makes a lot of sense.”

“Doesn’t it? So I’ve just been so worried about whether she was getting used to everything. Though I suppose I’m a bit of a worrywart, having seen how quickly she’s grown.”

I laughed. “I’m sure she’ll be fine. Live-On is a big ball of chaos to begin with—normal people are the ones who would stick out, not oddballs. This is just my opinion, but I think she’s having a lot of fun.”

“I’m so relieved to hear it! I’d love to chat with you some more, but it’s getting late. I’m sorry for stealing some of your sleep time. Have a good night.”

“It’s okay. Good night.”

I parted ways with Alice-chan’s mother, went back to the room, and slipped

into bed. And then, with a soft pat on the slumbering girl's head, I closed my own eyes again.

On the second day of the sleepover with Alice-chan, we ate breakfast, then set off early into the nice, cool winds outside. It was finally sightseeing day! I would be going straight to the Shinkansen after hanging out with her, so I'd already thanked her parents for their hospitality.

"Come with me, ma'am!" Then she hesitated. "But was it really okay for me to pick out everywhere we're going?"

"Yep," I replied. "I want to go where the locals would recommend."

"I see. Understood, ma'am. Then I'll do my best to escort you!"

"Thank you. In that case...here!"

"...Hm?" Alice-chan looked down at the hand I held out, confused.

Hee hee, I thought. She's so slow when it comes to things she doesn't expect. "You're going to escort me, right?" I said. "Well, then you have to at least hold my hand, or I may get lost."

She looked shocked for a moment. "F-Forgive me, ma'am! I'll hold your hand with all my might! For all my life! In fact, I'll stitch us together so that we're never parted again!"

"You're dipping *way* into the horror genre there. Anyone normal would have freaked out... Of course, I'm used to it by now, but still."

Alice-chan, who had offered to be my escort, led me by the hand as we went on a spree and enjoyed the sights. To prevent anyone nearby from realizing who we were, we stayed in Yuki and Ayumi mode. And while Ayumi-chan showed me all sorts of delicious local restaurants and sightseeing spots, she completely dropped the mask she used to cover up her bashfulness. Seeing her a bit anxious and on edge was a little funny.

Seeing and eating things for the first time only got better and fresher as you got older. Maybe it would be different if traveling was a hobby of mine or something, but the last time I'd taken a trip anywhere, it had been with Chami-

chan to the zoo. So, each time I did, it left a major impression on me. It was a clearly different kind of impression than when I'd been a kid and the world had brimmed with things I'd never seen. *Taking trips sure is nice*, I thought. *Maybe next time I'll ask one of my genmates or a senpai to go somewhere with me.*

As the time drew near for the sun to clock out, my stomach swelling and my feet just the right level of tired, Ayumi-chan suddenly suggested something. It didn't have anything to do with going around sightseeing—it was literally just something she wanted to do—but she wanted to know if I'd do some karaoke with her for a little under an hour.

I asked why, and she told me that she'd always dreamed of being able to sing with me. And now that the opportunity had presented herself, she'd invited me to.

Naturally, there was no reason to refuse. She'd been taking care of me this long, and I wanted to sing with her too. In fact, Ayumi-chan was really good—personally, I put her song videos on loop, I liked them so much. I was honored by the suggestion.

The two of us ended up mainly singing duets, raising our voices and having a merry time.

“You have so much more power in your voice than I do, Yuki-senpai,” she said at one point. “Is it just our timbre that's different? Or do you have a specific way you sing?”

“Hmm... I'm not sure, really. It's kind of like, from my belly, I guess...”

“Oh, like singing with your belly? I've been trying to do that too, but maybe I'm not doing it well enough...”

“No, that's not exactly it. It's more like...I sing from the StroZero in my belly, I guess? It's all like, *pshhh*.”

“Yuki-senpai, are you *sure* StroZero hasn't formed itself into its own organ inside you? I really don't think any ordinary person could create a voice like that...”

Time mercilessly passed, even while we were having fun singing. In a flash, our sojourn at the karaoke place ended, and it finally came time for us to part ways at the station. I couldn't help being reluctant, but eventually said goodbye to her in front of the ticket gates.

"I'm really thankful for all this," I told her. "I know it was all pretty sudden, but these two days have been wonderful, and I'll remember them for a long time."

"No, not at all!" she insisted. "In fact, come over as much as you want, and think of yourself as part of the family! And I mean, at that point, you might as well marry me and move in!"

I laughed. "A charming offer, but you should come to my place next time. I live alone, so there's no fun family like yours, but you're more than welcome."

"Y-Yes, ma'am! I promise I'll come! In fact, I'll do it right now! I'll marry you and move in!"

"Uh, aha ha... You might be talking differently because we're outside, but you're the same as always on the inside, huh?" I remarked, having to physically hold her back, since it seemed like she'd *actually* try to come with me. And then, still thinking about my late-night conversation with her mom, I asked something that had been on my mind. "Hey, Ayumi-chan, what's your relationship with your parents like?"

"My parents?" she repeated. "Why?"

"Umm, uhhh... Oh! I was just curious how it felt to live every day in a rowdy family like that!"

"Oh, okay... I mean, they get nosy from time to time, and sometimes I want to just be alone, but... I'd be more worried if they weren't around, I guess." She laughed. "They're so close to me, it's kind of embarrassing to put it like that. I could never tell them to their faces."

After a pause, I said, "You have really good parents, huh? You should cherish them."

"Huh? Well, of course I do. Why?" she asked, acting like she didn't understand why I'd even said that.

Another pause. “Right,” I said, fully satisfied. “See you again!”

And then I went through the ticket gates and got onto the Shinkansen.

That was an amazing break, I thought, filled with the energy to keep working hard and doing my best with streaming.



Kusoge with Nekoma-senpai

The very day after coming back from my sleepover with Alice-chan, Nekoma-senpai invited me to do a collab stream with her—today!

Sei-sama had resumed her streaming schedule last night, which was a load off my mind as this collab approached. After all, streams were always more fun for the viewers when the streamer was earnest and enthusiastic about them.

Anyway, time to start today's stream!

“Nya-nyaaan! I’m Nekoma, and I’m going to introduce some of the greatest filth stuck to the the annals of human history to all my owners out there! And today, we have a special guest!”

“Good evening, everyone. Another nice, light snow is falling today. I’m Awayuki Kokorone.”

: ｷﾀ—(°▽°)—!!! Awayuki-chan is here!!!

: We let the cat out to hunt, but I think she came back with some StroZero?

: no, it's not shuwa-chan, it's awa-chan. she came back with a perfectly beautiful and seiso lady!

: And lo, the owners all rejoiced

“You know,” I said, “now that I think about it, I’ve been in your chat before, or taken part in bigger collaboration projects. But this is our first one-on-one collab! What do you think of my ultimate charisma, Nekoma-senpai? It’s even got Hareru-senpai’s seal of approval!”

“Hmm... Well, I’m certainly getting that flehmen response. I smell a terrible scent trying to entice me!”

“Right? I knew you’d agree! Please do your best not to let yourself be seduced by this seiso scent of mine! By the way, what’s a flehmen response again?”

“It’s a physiological phenomenon that mainly happens when certain animals like cats smell something smelly!”

“I’m going to punch you.”

“But I’m a rare animal! If you punch me, Boss might show up.”

“Oh, just give it to me straight, doc! She’d execute me for that.”

“Nya?! Not even I drew the connection between Boss showing up and you getting executed!”

Anyway, to give a simple reintroduction of Nekoma Hirune-senpai: she was a little catgirl who, for some reason, looked at all of the wondrous, beautiful things the human race has produced, and instead decided to love shitty games—called *kusoge*—and shitty movies, the likes of which could be considered blemishes on the very history of mankind, above all else. *And that definitely makes her fit in pretty well with Live-On, huh...*

She usually did streams where she introduced the aforementioned things she liked to her “owners”—the viewers—but it was always more entertaining having someone else around to react to them. So she sometimes invited a guest, which was why I was here today.

Not only was I one hundred percent sure already that she’d be showing me something totally awful, but this was one of my liver-resting days. I wasn’t super into this, but I couldn’t turn down an offer from one of the senpais I looked up to—I’d been too gleeful about it. *I’ll just have to do my best, I thought. And there was something I wanted to ask her about, so this is the perfect chance. I’ll wait until the stream’s over.*

“Anyway, enough of the intros,” said Nekoma-senpai. “Let’s jump right in! Boy, do I have a video game to show you, Awayuki-chan!”

“Really hoping it’s a godlike game,” I muttered.

“It is, of course, a kusoge!”

“...You know, there’s still time to switch to *Animal Kart* or something. I’m pretty sure that would be much more fun.”

“No can do, Awayuki-chan. My body cannot be satisfied by anything but

kusoge anymore.”

“What kind of weird body is that?”

“I don’t want to hear it from the one whose personality does a one-eighty when she goes crazy consuming StroZero!”

: Live-On must pick people based on whether they go crazy consuming something

: Interviewer: Please tell me your reason for wanting to join us and also what you go crazy consuming

: lol

: Then would you prefer a shitty movie ma'am?

“No,” I insisted. “I’m trying to get away from the *shit* part. That would be the same thing...”

: what about a porno then? I'm sure that would make you happy

: How to get banned in one easy step

: Nobody ever learns lmao, her genmate JUST got her monetization revoked

: they'd be fine with it if you told them it was a video of animals mating, right? probably. maybe? actually idk

: I hope they're animal girls, like Nekoma

: Nekoma could smile at a nyan-nyan video of her own race, and everyone would be happy

“Nya-nya! That might satisfy Awayuki-chan, but it wouldn’t satisfy me! Besides, animal-girl adult videos are basically just a form of cosplay anyway!”

: No, those actresses have real ears and tails! That's what gives the videos such high fap-worthiness

“Nya-nya?! Whoever just said that, you need to submit that video to the world. For science. This is no time to be fapping!”

“My, what a *vulgar* conversation this is! How appalling! How very *astonishing*!”

“I can send you to the labs too, if you want.”

: it'll be the discovery of the century lmao

: Since it's an AV, it'll be both the discovery of the century and the discovery of the sin-tury

“Back to the topic at hand,” said Nekoma-senpai. “Awayuki-chan, this is going to be a kusoge like always, but it'll be a little bit different from the ones I usually show off.”

“Wait, really?” I said. “How is it different?”

“First, I'll have to tell you a little story...”

“No thanks.”

“Don't all jump at once! Awayuki-chan, you basically just did the same thing as if you'd said 'no thanks' to Hareru's super-emotional speech at the live concert! You'd get booed by the audience big-time! And Hareru would be so sad she'd burst into tears!”

“Is this going to be 'super-emotional' like hers was, then?”

“Nya-nya! You won't even know what hit you when I'm finished! It'll hit you just as hard as AIR's final episode! When she reaches her goal!”

“That *would* hit hard. Maybe I should have brought StroZero with me so I don't die of dehydration from crying.”

: awayuki-chan is in her "no" phase and I love it

: They grow up so fast

: **Hareru:** The name is "About Me." Please listen!

: **Awayuki:** No thanks.

: **Hareru:** ?!

: just imagining it is cracking me up XD

: The audience would probably throw empty StroZero cans at her

: Please don't take empty cans of booze to a concert like you would a penlight

: Any "about me" when it comes to Nekoma is gonna be shit

"Listen here, Awayuki-chan," she said. "Ever since being attracted to the deepest, darkest filth everyone wishes would remain buried, I've been enjoying kusoge and kuso-movies from all over the world, from all time periods."

"Yes, I'm well aware," I told her. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Sorry for my... Right, well, anyway. To tell you the truth, I feel like I'm reaching a breaking point."

"A breaking point?"

"Well, more like I've done it all by now. I obviously haven't enjoyed *every* shitty movie and game out there, but I've gone through every single well-known one. And in this business, if something is well-known, that means it's got really great shit factors. I could go looking for more obscure ones, but they all feel too normal compared to the famous ones. They lack that spark that really gets me, you know? Obviously new stuff comes out all the time—the chain of filth must continue. But the big hits like *Last Sword* don't show up every single year. Movies are one thing, but with development costs rising due to advancements in video game technology, you can't even set foot into the business without a ton of commitment and preparation! To be honest, I can play modern kusoge like any other game."

“It’d be weirder if you *wouldn’t* be able to play it like any other game.”

“But I love kusoge just as much as I love kuso-movies! The pain of being forced to watch an awful movie, of not being able to tear your eyes away from it—that’s wonderful. But having to actively set foot into the pain of a kusoge of your own volition? It’s positively *sensual*... I don’t want to see kusoge die out. I want their history of filth to continue on for eternity...”

“Not listening...”

“And that’s why I’ve been lamenting the future of my beloved kusoge genre. But one day, my love must have reached God, for I had a shocking revelation from the man upstairs himself! It felt like a lightning bolt had struck me in the head!”

“Really? What revelation was it?”

“That if I didn’t have enough kusoge in my life, I could just make it myself, nya!!!”

“Going a bit heavy on the catnip there, aren’t we?”

“W-Wait, what? That’s weird. That was the most moving part of the entire thing. That’s not how you were supposed to react. What about your goal?!”

“Goal? You’re weirding me out so much that you’re forcing me to walk in the opposite direction. And now you’re wondering where I’m going?”

“You have very odd sensitivities, Awayuki-chan.”

“Right back at you. It’s like you learned nothing from how Hareru-senpai talked about herself!”

“Could you pretend to be her for a moment then?”

“Sure. Ahem. ♪——♪”

“Oh, yeah, that’s right! That’s how she was! Phew! Live-On’s first-genner sure is cool!”

Hareru Asagiri: Nooooooooo!!! Please, noooooo!!! Don't expose me for all the world to seeeeeeeee!!!

: lmaooo

: Hareru-chan!

: HAHA what an amazing mental unison attack. Harerun is so cute when she's embarrassed

: ah yes, the rare but valuable True Harerun Embarrassment

: It's basically her only weakness

: The fact that Awayuki-chan practices this joke so much to bully Harerun just shows how close they are, i love it fr

: just say no to drugs!

Is she just here by sheer coincidence? I thought.

“Anyway,” said Nekoma-senpai, “movies would be a little outside our abilities, but even I should be able to make a free game, since I won’t profit off of it! That’s my thinking! And naturally, since I’d be making it myself, I wanted to make it the kind of game I would enjoy...”

“Something you would enjoy? W-Wait, no!”

“And now it’s finally time to explain what we’ll be doing for this stream! You, Awayuki-chan, are going to be playing the kusoge that I put all my heart and soul into!” announced Nekoma-senpai, sounding like she’d been waiting to finally say it.

I, on the other hand, felt the blood drain from my face. “Hold on a minute, Nekoma-senpai! All you said was that we’d be playing a kusoge today! This isn’t what you promised!”

“Yep. You’re going to play a kusoge that I made. I didn’t tell any lies.”

“I... That’s...”

“Sweet! Anyway, Awayuki-chan, it’s time to start the game!”

“I... I don’t want to! Any game you created is sure to be the filthiest electronic

trash the world has ever seen!”

“Wow, tell me how you *really* feel... You call this *seiso*?”

Whether I liked it or not, the game screen came up on my monitor. It seemed this was where the mischief-loving cat would get her engine started—well, actually, she’d been messing with me for a while now.

From this moment on, until the end of the stream, I expected to be pelted with a merciless stream of unexpected nonsense. I straightened up in my chair, unwilling to cave under the pressure, and pepped myself up.

Watch me, Hareru-senpai! Live-On has made my mind strong! I’ll be able to clear some dumb kusoge in the blink of an eye!

...Wait. How many times am I going to use the word “kusoge” in my sentences...?

“Here’s the game I’d like you to play today: *Nekoma Quest*!”

The game title came up, and Nekoma-senpai excitedly read it out loud, sounding like she just couldn’t wait a single moment longer. *That’s a pretty, um, fantastic background and title. Feels like I’ve seen it somewhere before...*

“Isn’t this the super-famous Dragon-whatever RPG?” I asked.

“Nya ha ha! I guess it’s obvious what it’s based on,” she said. “Yep, I lifted the entire top-down 2D RPG system from there. But it’s fine! It doesn’t matter how famous the original is, because you can rest assured that I’ve made it into a right and proper kusoge!”

“That just makes me *more* worried... Also, an RPG? Will we have enough time for it?” RPGs usually tended to be these long adventures that took a while to finish. I had the very streamer-like concern of not being able to show off the game’s charms—stains?—even if I were to start playing now.

But based on Nekoma’s reaction, I doubted there would be a problem. “Nah!” she said. “It’s an RPG, but it’s really short. You could probably beat it in a little over an hour if you just play normally. After all, this is the first game I’ve ever created. I couldn’t make it super intricate or anything.”

“I see. Well, it is very much a relief to hear that my suffering won’t last very

long.”

“W-Wait, I thought you were worried about the stream going too long... Well, whatever. The game’s a little experimental, since it’s my first one. It’s not really a *true* kusoge—more like a bakage or something. A parody of all the kusoge I like, with some original elements thrown in. I made it with *RPG Creator*, but even then it was seriously a ton of work...”

“I wish you’d spend that kind of effort on something else, but... I don’t see anything strange so far. Though I guess if the title screen were weird, I’d smash my computer screen before even starting the game.”

“Don’t! Your monitor has done so much for you! At least uninstall it instead!”

: I want to play Nekoma's game too!

: pls release to public!

: It's probably got some extreme virus in it

: a virus from nekoma??? talk about a reward! i want her to mess me er my PC up so bad I can't even restart it anymore

: Nekoma's owners seem a little too well-trained...

: Why's the owner being disciplined?

: I remembered this when you mentioned viruses. One time, I had this laptop that I didn't have any antivirus on. It got basically every virus out there, and ended up like a big virus nursery. ¥500

: wh...what...

: lmao, raising computer viruses? what a novel idea

“Also, this BGM is kind of really good?” I remarked. The song playing on the title screen was a simple looping melody, but it was really calming and catchy. I wanted to keep listening to it. “Is it a free BGM from the internet?”

“Nope! It’s an original song made by Hareru just for this game!”

“What?!” I exclaimed without meaning to at the unexpected revelation.
“Hareru-senpai composed you a song?!”

“Sure did! I asked, and she did it in one night!”

“She composed a song for this *excrement* you produced?!”

“Your insults are getting dirtier and dirtier, nya!”

Hareru Asagiri: Yay!

: This is what we call throwing genius down the drain
: awa-chan's insult made it sound like nekoma took a crap
on stream lmao
: I mean she's sitting next to someone who barfed on
stream. A little crap is fine right?
: Our oshi really is filthy, huh?
: XD

Hareru Asagiri: The song's name is Prebulululululewd.

: the name sounds like something you could flush down a
toilet.

*I was wondering why Hareru-senpai was here! I can't believe she was in on
this whole thing! She's planning on getting a kick out of me flipping out at this
kusoge, same as Nekoma-senpai!*

*I take back everything I said about wanting you to watch me! Do not watch!
Go home!*

...I'll go into her chat next time and have my revenge, I swear it.

“A lot of kusoge have weirdly good music in them, after all!” Nekoma-senpai
went on. “I’m very thankful for Hareru’s support!”

“I can’t. My straight-man game won’t last long enough. I’m just gonna start

the game..." Steeling myself, I pressed the "New Game" button.

The screen went all black, and then it began to play a video. In the middle, a strange light appeared, expanding and retracting as if pulsating.

"Is this...the opening of the game?" I asked hesitantly.

"That's right!"

I watched as the light's pulsing grew weaker. Eventually, it stopped for a few seconds, but then suddenly exploded, filling up the screen with light. And when that light cleared, a vast, top-down view of the game screen greeted my eyes.

"That was a pretty interesting opening... I wonder if it's foreshadowing something."

"Nya ha ha ha!" Nekoma-senpai laughed and didn't say anything.

Does it mean there's a story in here? I wondered. That would give me a little motivation to finish the game, but I don't know...

: That light... I feel like I've seen it before...

: Romance... Unfair... Old man... Urgh, my head!

"Oh, I can move now," I said. "Am I in a town?"

"The game's finally begun!" Nekoma-senpai announced. "If you go up, there's a castle. Go there first and ask the king what the point of the story is."

"Normally, I'd be excited to. But knowing this is a kusoge, I really am not sure I feel up to it... Can I go down instead?"

"I mean, sure, but that brings you out of the town."

"Is there a problem with that?"

"If you go outside without talking to the king and setting the flag, the game will freeze."

"It'll freeze?!"

"Yup!"

“In a way, the starting town is more dangerous than Wall Maria. I’m surprised it’s that bad... But that’s a bug, isn’t it? Just fix it, will you?”

“I put it in on purpose.”

“I’m going to shove your tail so far up your ass.”

“Nya nya?! Your insults are turning into threats! You’re just fighting poison with more poison now!”

“Maybe for you, but for me, I’m the only one being poisoned here! I don’t have automatic poison-healing properties, you know.”

I suddenly felt like going on a huge complaining rant, but since all I really had to do was go talk to the king, I quieted down and headed to the castle.

“Did Hareru-senpai write the town BGM too?” I asked.

“No, everything else is a free one. I couldn’t exactly force Hareru to write *all* of them.”

“You must have had to outright grovel to get her to write even one song for this.”

“Hareru actually suggested composing it. I told her I wanted to make a game, and she was like, then I’ll make a song!”

“I guess there’s a thin line between geniuses and idiots...”

I got there without any real problems on the way. To sum up what the king told me, there was a demon lord threatening the world, and he wanted a powerful hero to defeat him. You know, your totally basic plotline. It left me wondering how to even react to it.

“Nya nya. You can go outside the town now!”

“All right, then. Time to leave the walls.”

I headed straight out the town’s exit, and the screen turned black. The town wasn’t seamlessly linked to the rest of the world, so maybe the world map was about to come up.

The black continued for five seconds...then ten...

“Umm...” I said. “Did the game freeze? It’s just sitting here on a black

screen...”

“Nope, that’s just the loading time!”

“I see...”

After another twenty seconds of waiting, color finally returned to the screen.

“Hey, there’s the world map!” said Nekoma-senpai.

After seeing how long that had taken to load, I had a bad feeling. “Umm, there’s something I want to try. Can I go back into town?”

“Nya? Sure, I don’t see why not!”

With Nekoma-senpai’s permission, I went back into town. I had thought that maybe the world map had taken a while to load because it was the first time, but this *was* a Nekoma-made game. So maybe...

The screen turned black again, and an empty silence followed, confirming my suspicions.

Five seconds... Ten seconds...

I took a deep breath. “Nekoma-senpai?”

“Nya?”

“These shitty load times—do they happen every time?”

“Yup.”

“You did it on purpose?”

“Yup.”

“Ah, I see. I understand. Great! I’ll see you in court.”

“Whoa, your anger went all the way back around to being seiso, huh? That’s kinda terrifying.”

“Why wouldn’t I be angry?! We’re streamers, remember?! Are we supposed to be just *chatting away* every time a black loading screen comes up for thirty solid seconds?! I guess I’d be able to, but having to go back and forth between that and the actual *game* would be just exhausting! Tamori-san is about the only one who could pull it off with ease!”

“Nya fu fu! A black screen, eh? Very fitting for Tamori-san.”

“...Huh?”

“Oh, I was just making a joke about how he has those trademark sunglasses, and the black loading screens are like you’re looking at them through sunglasses... I’m sorry if that went over your head...”

“I’m sorry, did you just start streaming yesterday?! You’re gonna need way better conversational skills to make it through these stupid long load times!!! What were you thinking?! You made something that could kill streamers *and* you at the same time!”

“Nya ha ha! I’m joking, of course! Your reactions are so good that I’m starting to have fun!”

“Mgh!”

“That was a compliment, you know. Having good reactions is a really important skill for a streamer. And that’s the reason everyone watching this stream is having such a good time, right?”

“Maybe, but nothing will come of complimenting me at this point. Anyway, whatever. I’m finished testing this, so I’m going back outside the town.”

“Oh, wait a second!”

“Huh?” I’d completely relaxed my guard once the load screen disappeared, so I accidentally walked straight out of town before Nekoma-senpai could stop me.

“Wh-What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?! The game froze!”

“What?!” *It froze?! From that?! Why?! I didn’t do anything!!!*

“You remember how I said you have to talk to the king first, or else the flag won’t be set and the game will freeze when you leave?”

“Huh? But I just did all that!”

“Well, umm, you have to do it every time, not just the first time.”

Huh? Not just the first time?

.....

“Gugahhhhhh!!!”

“Nya nya?! Oh no! Her reactions are finally hitting Resident Evil zombie levels! Hey, just calm down! Take deep breaths!”

“Hee...hoo...haah...hoo...”

“There, good girl! And I mean, if you want to get *specific*, the game didn’t freeze—I just set the load time to take three million hours! Nya ha ha!”

“Hee hee, hee, hee, hee, haaaa! Hee hee, hee, hee, hee, haaaa!”

“Now she’s breathing like a Regenerator from RE4?!”

: I have fond memories of RE4! It's a great game

Hareru Asagiri: I love it because Regene-tan is so cute

: I think Iron Maidens are cuter, actually

Hareru Asagiri: Uh? Those things are bristling like porcupine fish. Obviously Regene-tan is way cuter because of its smooth, beautiful skin.

: Being a genius (lol) has caused your sense of beauty to bug out lmaoooo

Hareru Asagiri: Pfft. I KNOW the reason you're running away from it but staying almost barely within its grasp is because you think it's soooo cute. And I bet Maiden hates you for it lololol

: I'm a fan of Ashley

Hareru Asagiri: wait...an Ashley fan? are you for fucking real? That's the weirdest fetish I've ever heard

: I could maybe, MAYBE understand being a fan of the village chief, but Ashley? That's so weird, oh god, oh god...

: And this right here is the darker side of democracy, folks

With my start already spoiled several times over, *Nekoma Quest* was finally getting going. Apparently there were two mini-dungeons aside from the demon king's castle. While you could go straight to the castle, clearing the dungeons would give you party members, better gear, and level-ups, so it was apparently recommended to do them to keep the difficulty normal.

"Okay, then I guess I'll go into this mini-dungeon," I said.

I ran into a few enemies on the way to the dungeon, but they were super normal. The battle system was that tried-and-true turn-based kind, although all I really had to do was punch until my HP ran low and then use an herb to recover. It seemed like I'd learned a spell or something, but I didn't need it whatsoever.

"This is surprisingly simple," I commented, a little relieved.

A moment later, I ran into some weird enemy called a Salamando, which used some weird attack called Throw Kariu. It locked me out of doing anything and then killed me, which pissed me off. But on the second run-through, I managed to make it to the end of the mini-dungeon.

"Finally here..." I said. "Took so much time with the loading screens and that Kyoko Okitegami-like king who doesn't have any detective talent whatsoever... Also, I will never forgive that Salamando! What the heck is a kariu, anyway?"

"Oh, that comes from a game called *Hoshi wo Miru Hito*, which everyone should check out!"

"Ahh... You know, I think I might have seen you playing that on stream a long time ago..."

As we chatted, I entered the dungeon. Near the entrance, I met a priest character named Danny who wanted to get to the end of the dungeon too, and we hit it off and became a party.

"Hey, I got a party member! Now I could probably eat one of those kariu things and come out just fine!"

"Danny's a healer! He specializes in healing magic!"

Danny was a pretty talented character. His attack power was fairly low, and he was on autopilot, which meant I couldn't give him commands. But since he was able to use the single-target healing spell Heal, he'd patch me up if I ever got hurt. Just having him around made my herb consumption plummet. I precariously cleared the dungeon and received a powerful weapon called the Hero's Sword.

For the first time, I was actually impressed with how smoothly the game was going—and then, on the way back from the dungeon, it happened.

After clearing the dungeon and going up to a bonus floor, Danny, whose level had increased, learned a new spell: Judgment. As long as Judgment connected with its single target, it would kill them instantly. And I was all giddy about him finally contributing to offense, when...in the first battle after he learned it, I was struck dumb.

I took a hit from an enemy, and while Danny would have normally cast healing magic on me, he instead cast Judgment on me and insta-killed me.

"Nekoma-senpai... What is this?"

"Nya ha ha!" she laughed. "Danny is actually programmed to use his highest-level spell if he ever has an ally who took damage. Until now, that was Heal, but now Judgment is higher up, so he'll kill all his weakened allies without mercy."

"He's a freaking psychopath!!! Hang on. So then he's gonna chant instadeath magic on allies until he learns another spell?! That's too crazy even for a Konosuba character!"

"Oh, he won't learn any more healing magic," she assured me. "The next one he learns is the last one. It's called Last Judgment. It insta-kills everything. Once he learns it, he'll become a murder machine throwing out battle-wide instadeaths, enemy and ally alike."

"What happened to him being some kind of holy healer?"

"Once he runs out of MP, he'll attack without magic. It'll be like a drop in the bucket, though."

"Ah. I see... I wonder if he can at least be a meat shield."

“Also, experience points are split among party members. If you get Danny killed, you’ll be able to hog them all for yourself.”

“Awesome. Okay, Danny, get out of my party.” I brutally attacked Danny.

: LMA000 he doesn't learn a full-party heal but he does learn a full-party instadeath

: He's out for blood, more than anyone I've ever seen

: Even if he fails to insta-kill a weakened ally, he'll keep trying until his MP runs out. And yet as soon as you heal yourself with an herb, he goes back to pretending he's your friend! My sides have literally exploded!

: Just like Danny the slaughterer after learning Last Judgment

: I guess the Heal in this case was the villain sort huh

“Nya nyaaan! Time to go to the next dungeon!”

“I do want to go back to town and refill on recovery items. I’m pretty sure this next dungeon’s not going to be anything good.”

The dungeon was, in fact, not anything good.

It was the second mini-dungeon of the game, where you got a new party member named Greg—who was every bit as much of a lunatic as Danny. He was a tough guy, both for his swordsman-like appearance and his stats, and he could draw enemy attacks to himself by using his special skill, Cover.

If only it had stopped there, he would have been a totally useful character. Unfortunately, he was programmed to use a recovery item every single time he lost even one point of HP. More important was where those healing items came from—my own items, rather than his!

Naturally, like Danny, I couldn’t give him commands. In other words, just having him around depleted every last healing item I’d gone through all that

trouble to get.

According to Nekoma-senpai, when all your on-hand healing items were gone, he'd instead be locked into only using a move called Blame Shift, which redirected attacks aimed at him to his allies. He was a shithead in a shit game, and so I had him dead instantly like I had Danny.

: They've gotta be the demon king's minions right?

: lmao, they're very sus

: Shoulda taken a cue from the Hi-Potion Prince!

: Turns out it was a solo adventure all along...

: Danny? Greg? Have I heard those names before?

I then cleared that mini-dungeon and finally made it to the demon king's castle. The ending of the game was in sight at last—armed with the fruits of my adventures thus far, the Hero's Sword and the Hero's Armor, both dungeon-clear rewards. Plus two corpses.

"This useless luggage is bothering me..." I commented.

"Nyaa nya! Don't say that! The Hero's gear you have is pretty strong, and you've leveled up too!"

"I suppose so, but... Well, I guess it doesn't matter. Nothing to do now but to charge toward the end credits!"

It was finally time for the last dungeon. The enemies here were stronger, but the Hero's gear was seriously overwhelming. It made getting through the place a breeze.

Eventually, I came before the demon king. I was just one step away from ending my suffering. Frustratingly, however, it was there that I met with an unexpected roadblock.

Barring my path was a puzzle to solve—the final gimmick before diving into the last boss fight. There were three doors here and a sign reading, "If given the choice." I knew at least that one of the doors was the correct one, but I had no

idea which.

“Huh...? Did I miss a hint somewhere...?”

My eyes drifted between the doors, which were colored green, red, and blue, as I searched through my memories.

...Nope, I thought. Aside from the sign, I don't have any hints to this puzzle.

“What do I do now... Should I go with my gut? Nekoma-senpai, if I get the wrong door, what happens?”

“The game will freeze and you'll have to start back at your save point in town!”

“Why couldn't it just be a game over?! Why do you love freezes so much?!”

Ugh! I don't want to have to do this all over again. But which is it? Which door is correct?

“Hrrrrmmm...”

“Think of the path you've been through to get here, Awayuki-chan! You'll be okay! I know you can solve this!”

“Are you telling the truth?”

Judging by Nekoma-senpai's tone, this wasn't just a game of luck. The path I'd walked in this game was barely a *path* at all. It was just a shitty, dusty road. But was there a hint somewhere in there?

Let's see, I thought. I talked to the king, experienced unfair deaths, went to the dungeons, got the Hero's Gear, killed Danny and Greg...

Wait. Hold on. Danny and Greg?

My brain caught on something. I could kind of tell that whatever it was, it was the secret to unraveling this mystery.

And then, when I remembered the sign that said, “If given the choice,” it all came undone. I knew the answer!

“Nekoma-senpai! Wait! Is it...?!”

“Ohhh! You've finally figured it out, Awayuki-chan! I knew it! I knew you'd be

able to! Now, let's say it together! One, two..."

On Nekoma-senpai's signal, I shouted the words alongside her!

"Given the choice, I choose the red door!!!"

And as I spoke the legendary phrase, I immediately opened the red door.

"Wait, that really wasn't much of a hi—"

"Right, so for the last boss you'll be fighting Combat Echizen."

"I thought it was the demon king! Isn't that guy just a mercena—"

"Danny, Greg, you alive?"

"No, they're dead—ahh, my comebacks aren't making it in time! Haah... Haah... Haah..."

: omg I did not expect death crimson here lmaoooo

: Only people who know about that game would be able to solve that!

: If Echizen is the last boss, then Danny and Greg are DEFINITELY spies

: what do you mean, "given the choice"...???

: What the heck is this kusoge?!

: It's more like a bakage, just like Nekoma said lol

My comebacks drowned against the human wave attacks, putting me well out of breath.

A long time ago, before I'd joined Live-On, I remembered watching a video where Nekoma-senpai had shown off where she'd pulled this from—a game called *Death Crimson*. That was why I'd managed to guess the red door was correct.

...Phew. That's finally settled.

"Great!" I shouted. "Anyway, you stupid freaking boss, it's time to say your

prayers!!!!!"

And so I charged the final boss, smashing all of the hatred and exhaustion from all those missed comebacks into him.

A few minutes later...

"Congratulations! You beat the game!" said Nekoma-senpai.

"It's finally over..." I moaned.

I'd brilliantly defeated Combat Echizen, then sat through the short credits and went back to the title. I'd beaten the game. I'd accomplished my goal for this stream.

"Now that it's over, it was kind of interesting, in a really weird way," I mused. "It made for an exciting stream too. Although if I never have to play it again, it'll be too soon."

"Nya ha ha!" she laughed. "Seriously, thanks for this, Awayuki-chan! I never knew how amazing it feels to have someone play a game you made! Plus, I know what to do better next time. I can't thank you enough!"

"...You're going to make it *better*, are you?"

"Yeah, for real! A lot of the reason this stream even worked was because of your genius streaming talents. The number one thing I want to make better is this: if I'm gonna make a new game and have a different Liver play it, I need to make sure it's good on stream—you know, have a stream where they can focus fully on the game."

"I, er, I see... I mean, I agree it's best to make sure it's good on stream. Um, I don't know about my streaming talents, though."

"Don't be modest! Ever since you went crazy, you've grown a lot. I'm surprised how crazy angry you got, even without the StroZero in you. But I'm not gonna lose! I'm your senpai, after all! Actually, what were you saying about my charisma at the beginning?"

"H-Hey, it's one thing if someone else says it about you, and a totally different thing if you bring it up!"

: When you really think about it, both Awa-chan and Shuwa-chan constantly making every stream exciting is kinda crazy?

: It's so normal for her that it's hard to actually notice, but she's some kind of genius

Hareru Asagiri: Hah! I knew you'd all understand!

“Nya ha ha! And maybe that cute side of you is getting you all the views too! Great! We’re at the end of the stream now, so Awayuki-chan, give us your impressions of the game!”

“I think the most fun way to play this game would have been to leave it on the title screen and listen to Hareru-senpai’s music play for an hour.”

“And with that high praise, it’s time to bid you all farewell, nya!”

Phew! That does it for today’s stream! ...Hey, wait a minute. “Nekoma-senpai, what was that light at the beginning of the game, anyway?”

“What? Oh, you mean that! It didn’t mean anything!”

“Huh?”

I must be the first Liver to ever end a stream with the word “huh”...

“Good stuff! Thanks again for helping out today, Awayuki-chan.”

“Not at all. I was happy you invited me on! ...Also, umm, I had something to talk to you about. Do you have time?”

“Hmm? Sure, I’ve got plenty. What’s up?”

After the stream, as I’d mentioned at the start, I had something I’d been wanting to ask Nekoma-senpai. It was, of course, related to Sei-sama. “From your point of view as her genmate, is Sei-sama going to be okay?”

“Oh, I see... Is it bothering you?”

“Yes. She seems like she’s acting strange, somehow... I guess I’m relieved she

started streaming again like normal, but...”

“Yeah... I don’t think you need to worry about her much!”

“Uhh...” That answer came off as so uncaring that I couldn’t help but let the cringe I felt into my voice. If even her genmates were treating her like this, what kind of havoc had Sei-sama been wreaking?

“Ha ha ha!” she laughed. “Hey, don’t react like that! I’m worried too, you know.”

“Are you sure? You sounded pretty hands-off to me.”

“Look, I know it might come off as a little weird. But I think it gives me a certain perspective.”

“What kind of perspective?”

“I get the feeling the next big star won’t be you or me, Awayuki-chan.”

“...Hmm?” I couldn’t even tell if that was supposed to be an answer to the question, so it just made me even more confused.

“Uhh, well, you know. Like I said right up front, as long as you do your energetic streams and make Live-On exciting, everything will turn out A-OK!”

“Huh...”

“Ha ha ha! You’re clearly not convinced.”

“Urk.” *She’s sharper than I expected*, I thought, feeling rude for thinking it.

“I’m not just leaving her to her own devices. I don’t know exactly what she’s thinking, but I have a hunch. I’ll do what I can as a backup. Would you trust me to handle this?”

“...Yes, I think I will.” This time, I agreed wholeheartedly. For some reason, Nekoma-senpai’s words had a persuasive quality to them. It was probably the weight they carried—she’d been with Sei-sama as part of the second generation this whole time, after all. Perhaps it was their shared bond. Nekoma-senpai had to be just as worried about Sei-sama as I was, but she understood her from a different perspective.

I thought back to what Live-On had been like before I’d come into the third

gen, back when I'd been just another viewer. When it had moved from the solo Hareru-senpai show to a greater project encompassing all of Live-On. The second-genners each had their own unique talents, but none of them were as omnipotent as Hareru-senpai.

But that in itself had brought new charms and attractions. They each made up for the other's deficits, helped them, and they all gained popularity together. From the viewers' point of view—myself included—they felt like a totally new group, not just Hareru-senpai's successors. And that had been what had truly formed Live-On as an organization.

I was sure there had been difficult points. But we were only here because they'd overcome them.

What else could I do but have faith? Best to leave it to those most qualified. Nekoma-senpai understood the situation and seemed to be able to think calmly about how to handle it. She was way past where I was—worried sick over the whole thing.

“Anyway, yeah,” she went on. “If you’ve got anything you need to talk about, you can always call me up. Actually, if you get any extra news, could you tell me about it?”

“I shall. Thanks so much for your time.”

“Don’t mention it. Man, what a treat! I got to see tsundere Awayuki-chan worried about Sei!”

“What?!”

“Nya ha ha ha! Farewell!”

Just as the conversation was about to end on a serious note, she pulled a very Nekoma-esque move and left me with a tease.

“Who are you calling tsundere?!” I demanded—though, having seen the second generation’s bond from up close, I couldn’t help but smile a little at how much it warmed my heart.

Idle Talk: Portents

“Ugh, what should I do...?”

Outside, it was twilight, and inside, Sei Utsuki was in bed, staring at her smartphone screen and muttering to herself. Shown on the phone was her private chat with her friend Shion Kaminari.

“How are you doing today? Did you remember to eat? Are you keeping up your normal lifestyle? I know I said it already, but Mama’s here to give her full support with the monetization incident! So don’t worry!”

“Oh, and you can feel free to talk to me any time you want, except when I’m streaming! And not just me—I’m sure that goes for everyone else too! Oh, I know! When we have time, we should get together and have a strategy meeting to discuss how to get that monetization back!”

Sei wasn’t sure how she was supposed to respond to that. Ever since her monetization had been revoked, Shion had been sending her all sorts of nuanced chat messages and phone calls on a daily basis. Her attempts at caretaking had gotten to the point where it was actually kind of scaring Sei. *Although that’s very like her*, she thought, unable to stop herself from laughing—despite her worries—as she read over the chat.

“She’s such a nice girl, but...” she muttered, heaving a sigh. “I wish she’d give me a break.”

She started to think again. She’d been dodging the issue by writing noncommittal responses, but she also felt that technique was reaching the end of its usefulness. No matter how many times she told Shion she was all right, Shion didn’t stop messaging her. Sei knew it was because her friend realized she *wasn’t* all right.

“...It’s like we got too close with each other without me realizing it,” murmured Sei. “I’m so stupid it makes me want to barf. What am I doing?”

She heaved an even bigger sigh, then decided to save answering for later and

switched away from the chat window—to a whole heap of unread-message notifications. They were all words of worry or encouragement from her fellow Livers. It had been like that yesterday too, and she thought she'd responded to them all. But today she apparently had a couple from people who didn't usually message her. In any case, the sight was enough to make her sputter in surprise.

"Oh, jeez," she muttered. "I'll have to reply to *these* later too."

She opened her chat with Shion again and thought about how to respond. Eventually...

"Thanks for worrying about me. I'm perfectly fine, no problems here. I'm sure the monetization stuff will work itself out soon. I'm not low on money or anything either, so there's no need for me to rush. As long as you're the same as always and Live-On is the same as always, I'll be fine."

In the end, all she could do was write yet another avoidant reply.

"What are they all so worried about?" Sei muttered to herself. She was happy her friends were willing to worry over her and wanted to help her out. But that was exactly what was paining her right now.

"Thanks, everyone. And I'm sorry."

After that, Sei—although she wasn't going back to sleep now—shut her eyes for a long while.

Meanwhile, around that time...

"Mgh!!!"

On the other side of the chat, Shion was talking to herself just as much.

"Another one of these answers! What, does she think I don't realize she's acting weird?!"

Like Sei had suspected, Shion had realized something was bothering her friend—and Shion had just about had it with those noncommittal replies. The two of them had walked side by side ever since their birth as Livers. At this point, each of them could all too easily pick up on the slightest thing wrong with the other.

“It’s like that stupid pervert doesn’t understand how much I’ve been watching her! Doesn’t she see how much more off her game she’s getting every single day?! Ugh, now I’m all worked up... I wonder if Nekoma’s around to listen to me complain.”

As a test, she sent a DM to her genmate Nekoma Hirune. The girl seemed to have some free time, so Shion called her up—then rattled off the entire contents of her recent exchanges with Sei like a machine gun.

“It’s like that!” she finally finished. “She’s got me as worried as some little baby would!”

“Yup, yup,” replied Nekoma. “I see, nya.”

“What do you think, Nekoma?”

“I think you really like Sei a lot.”

“Wh-What?! What are you on about?! Were you even listening?!” exclaimed Shion in surprise, her face reddening.

“Hey, I was listening. You watch Sei more than anyone else does. And then you get worried sick about her if she starts acting strange. But she won’t talk to you honestly, which really gets you frustrated, right?”

“That’s... That’s not it!”

“Isn’t it? That’s clearly what all that stuff you just said was pointing to.”

“No, that’s just... Wait. Huh?” Shion thought back over what she’d just told her genmate, then realized Nekoma was exactly right—it was *that* obvious. She was at a loss for words.

Nekoma gave a catlike laugh at the sudden quiet, then continued in a somehow gentle voice. “You don’t have to deny it,” she said. “Sei’s really precious to you, isn’t she? It’s a good thing.”

Shion stayed silent.

“I don’t know what’s on Sei’s mind either, but I’m sure your feelings are getting through to her. All you have to do is keep showing her consideration and thoughtfulness.”

After a long pause, Shion said, “Right. Thanks for hearing me out, Nekoma.”

“No worries. My genmates are precious to me too, you know.”

They said their goodbyes, then ended the call. But even after that, for a good while, Shion’s face remained hot, and her heart kept on pounding like the beats of a taiko drum.

“.....Crap.”



Chapter 2

It's Huntin' Time

When a Japanese gamer hears the title *Monster Slayer*, almost all of them will exhibit some sort of physical reaction to it. The game's popularity exploded with the release of more and more games in the series, eventually becoming a legendary title with popularity levels shocking enough to be called a societal phenomenon. But it wasn't because of any newcomer-friendly game balance or a put-together UI. No—these games teach you how much fun it can be to work together with friends.

And despite explaining all this at length, I, Awayuki Kokorone, am basically not even a gamer. My experience with *Monster Slayer* was zero, and that whole explanation was basically copy pasted from wiki sites. But then a three-hit combo smacked me right in the face: a new game in the series came out, it was so well-made that it got super popular, *and* it started trending in Live-On. As I watched more and more streams, the *Monster Slayer* itch got stronger and stronger until I couldn't take it anymore—and today, a brand-new hunter was about to be born.

"Pshhh! A new star is descending upon the world of *Monster Slayer*! It's me, Shuwa-chan! Woohoo! And today, we have a special guest!"

"Yahoo! Everyone's sun, Hareru Asagiri, has risen! Since Shuwacchi doesn't know anything about *Monster Slayer*, I'll be her teacher today and help her out through the very beginning of the game!"

That's right! A second collaboration in a row, right on the heels of the one with Nekoma-senpai! Woohoo! Only Hareru-senpai would be assisting me today, but for the next few days, I'd be collabing with several others.

I'd been looking forward to this so much that I'd started planning it out ages ago. After my post-stream talk with Nekoma-senpai, I'd decided to forget all my worries and slam down the StroZeros for this long-awaited *MonSlay* stream to

have as much fun and excitement as possible. *Are you watching, Sei-sama?! I don't know what's going through that head of yours, but I'll make you laugh so hard you'll forget all that serious shit, so you better be ready for me!!!*

"I never expected *you* to want to babysit me," I said to Hareru-senpai. "Had some free time, did you, senpai?"

"What? How impudent!" she replied. "From now on, you are to call me Your Teaching Excellency (Special Emperor Queen Princess God-Monarch XXL Portion Fried Pegasus Mix) and bow down to worship me, you lowly commoner!"

"Doesn't it sadden you to assert your dominance over an ignorant, helpless kouhai? Oh, but is that why nobody will collab with you anymore? I see. I see how it is."

"Sniffle. Do you hate me, Shuwacchi?"

"...If I hated you, I wouldn't have asked you to be my teacher to begin with."

"Sh-Shuwacchi!"

"H-Hareru-senpai!"

"Dereshishishishishi!!!" we laughed together.

: quit it with the sudden audrey respect

: Wait, I've never heard that weird laugh before except for in One Piece. it's used elsewhere too???

: Please play monster slayer now

: what's scary is the fact that these two could go for hours in their pregame conversation

: Both of them would probably die if they stayed quiet for too long

**DERESHISHISHI
HISHI?**



In any case, I'd asked for Hareru-senpai's help because this game was too hard to go in knowing absolutely nothing and get anywhere. With how recent the game was, the other Livers weren't very far in either, but a lot of them were veterans of the series, so the way they moved about in-game was definitely something else. Since I wanted to play co-op with them all next, I at least wanted to get the basic game systems down first.

"Anyway, time to start the game! Woohoo!"

"Sure thing!"

We then watched the opening play, showing giant monsters rampaging through a fantasy landscape, which was all very exciting. This game appeared to have a Japanese theme to it; I could feel the Japanese spirit sleeping deep within me wake up and grow fully erect.

The hero Yamato Takeru once said this: *I fucked up my life by getting too into MonSlay*. It's written right there in the *Kojiki*, so there's no doubt about it.

Eventually the opening ended, and the game showed my character—whom I'd already created—sleeping in bed.

And then two figures appeared. *Wh-What?! "Hey, Pegasus!"* I exclaimed. "Bad news!"

"Yeah? What's going on, Awayuki-boy?!"

"Two female monsters that look like walking reproductive organs just showed up!" *Wh-Who the hell are these two pointy-eared sisters that look like bulk fetishes sold at Costco?!*

"What a disaster!" replied Hareru-senpai. "Forget *Monster Slayer*—this is more like *Monster Layer*! Could *MonSlay* have been a *monstergirl*-hunting eroge all along?! Do you hunt both of these sex-fiend sisters *at the same time?!"*

"<Wao! Nice Millennium Eye! Me no Toon Pegasus can attack directly too, dess!>"

: I totally expected this reaction but I still can't stop

laughing lmao

: you had so many options for what to call her, and you had to go with pegasus

: Hey, is Pegasus-san doing the whole mind crush thing?

: Oh, I see. This must be that game I heard about, MonMusu Quest.

: The terror of not having a straight man in your comedy duo

“Also, why is the main character still asleep?” I asked. “If you don’t ‘stand up’ now, when will you?! Pun intended! Give your mission your all! Do the best you can, go as far as your lewdness will take you! Don’t die a dog’s death! *Stand up! Dance with pride! Warrior who has received fate*—at least, that’s who you *should* be!”

“Yes! It is time, folks, for the beginning of the Uma Otoko Full-Dick Derby! Just as all quests begin from a base camp, everything else begins from the base camp between your legs, dess! Awayuki-boy, now is the time to say the quote I taught you before, dess!”

“Y-Yes, ma’am! Here I go. One, two...”

“It’s violatin’ time!” we shouted together.

“...Wait,” I said.

“Hm?” said Hareru-senpai. “What’s the matter, Awayuki-boy?”

“Now that I think of it, I made a woman in character creation, so she’s got nothing that can ‘stand up.’”

“Uh, what? You already screwed things up during character creation? Pegasus just cringed so hard he went back to the Kingdom arc.”

: holy shit lmfaooooooooo

: Guilty as charged

: I strongly recommend always having a box of sweets with you to use for apologies

: Two of the dumbest geniuses I've ever seen

: how can you screw things up during character creation...

Anyway, not sure what that was all about, but it's time for my monster-slaying life to begin!

With the opening finished, I entered some exposition drops and tutorials for how to take on quests. Hareru-senpai told me where other things were as well, like the item shop and the food place. Next up was what I'd been waiting for—the weapon shop owner's explanation.

I spoke to the stern-faced man inside the shop making weapons and found a whole heap of different weapons I could use. Apparently, I could choose whichever I wanted.

"Yes!" exclaimed Hareru-senpai. "Any weapons you wanted to use, Shuwacchi?"

"Hmm... Any recommendations?"

"Recommendations? I mean, certain weapon types are easier to use than others, but I think the real fun of this game is sticking with whatever weapon you fall in love at first sight with. You can be strong with any of them once you learn how to use them, so pick whichever you like most!"

Hmm, I thought. The one that interests me most is...

"And if there's any you're into," she went on, "I can explain how they work. I'm an all-rounder—I've mastered every weapon in *MonSlay* there is!"

"Thank you. In that case, what about this super-basic one-handed sword?"

"Right! As you can see, one-handed swords have a good balance of offense and defense and no real peculiarities—you can use them as easily as one of your limbs! On the other hand, they don't have big bursts of power, so they tend to be seen more as a support weapon. I think Maashii was using them

too.”

“Mashiron uses them? I see. What you’re saying is, it can be used to ‘attack’ *and* ‘defend,’ so it’s basically the futanari type? Which means Mashiron is a futanari, right?”

“You’re wrong.”

: You're not wrong.

Mashiro Irodori: You're wrong

: Please be wrong

: Maybe she only wants it to be wrong and there's still a chance it's not wrong

: XD

: Mashiron so moe watching Shuwa-chan's stream because she's worried

Mashiro Irodori: D-Don't misunderstand me, got it?! Don't misunderstand me, got it?! Don't misunderstand me, got it?!

: Mashiron, tsunderes say more than that one line. Now it just sounds like you're a broken record pointing out someone's mistake.

: she's so cute, putting everything into her boke like that

“Okay, in that case, how about these dual blades?” I asked.

“Righto!” replied Hareru-senpai. “With two smaller swords, one in each hand, you can specialize more in attacking by stringing together destructive combos! Seisei loves them—they’re full of fantasy and chuunibyou!”

“I see. Can you explain the hunting horn now?”

“Okey dokey! That weapon’s got a bunch of special effects loaded in it. You can actually play it like an instrument while you fight! Oshio uses them!”

“Oshio is Shion-mama, right? I see. Now this horn thing makes sense.”

“Ohh?”

“Yeah. I can play the voice of a female in heat to males of that species, messing with their heads and doing damage to them from within!”

“Your idea is actually legit genius, but unfortunately that’s not how it works. When you play, it makes all your allies stronger!”

“Wait, then you strengthen their vitality—heh—by playing moaning voices? Wouldn’t Sex-sama pop such a boner that she’d become a triple-wielder? Two in her hands, one in her crotch?”

“That’s stupid.”

“You’re stupid!”

“Why are you scolding *me* when *you’re* saying stupid stuff?!”

: XDDD triple-wielding

: Zoro? Is that you?

: I just imagined her swinging her dual blades around while also wagging her crotch to attack with that too. Long story short, my tea is all over my keyboard now

: I actually kinda think they might add debuffs to the horn

: The terror of being toyed with by Harerun

“Next... Hmm. What about the greatsword?” I asked.

“You’ve got a good eye, friend! As you can see, the greatsword is heavy, slow, and dull, but has maybe the best destructive power out there! And while it looks like it would weigh you down, it’s surprisingly easy to use. Normally you use hit-and-run tactics while charging up huge attacks while the monsters are off guard!”

“I see. In other words—”

“No.”

“I didn’t say anything yet!”

“If I recall correctly, Pikarin uses them religiously! Kinda fits her image too!”

Pikarin must mean Hikari-chan, I thought. She never plays anything normally...

After that, I had her explain a few other weapons I was interested in, and I quickly narrowed down my candidates until...

“Hareru-senpai, I’ve made up my mind.”

“Oh! Great, awesome! Which are you choosing?”

“I had to ask myself—which is the closest to giving me a third leg?”

“Hey, were you actually listening to me? When you say ‘third leg,’ I don’t—”

“I have chosen the lance!”

“Okay, whatever! Giving up! Why’d you choose that one?”

“You see, I have but one objective in this game.”

“Objective? Come on, tell me!”

I only wanted to accomplish one thing from this game! And that was... “To rob every single monster of their virginity!”

“Uh, what?”

“I give my oath that I will play fair! And with this lance—with its sharp tip and its immensely thick base—I solemnly swear to SEX every monster in the game!”

“That’s stupid.”

“You’re stupid!”

“Again, why?!”

: LMFA0000000

: lolololll

: Someone get the general hospital over here!

: Despite how many millions of people play this game,

this is 100% the first time anything like this has been done

: Ah yes, the slayer (of many things)

Anyway! From here on out, I was excited to be mastering the art of monster-hunting by collabing with a bunch of other Livers! Thank you for all you've taught me, Hareru-senpai!

"Sorry, sorry! Here I am! I'm finally joining the party!" called out the energetic voice.

"Oh, you're here!" I replied.

"You two will be the front line, okay~?" came the laid-back voice.

"Gotcha! I'll show you the pride of the party's brawn!" bragged the energetic voice.

The day after learning all the basics from Hareru-senpai, I was finally enjoying a collab hunt with other members of Live-On. The party today was Ehrai-chan, Hikari-chan, and the nonalcoholic me. We were all playing co-op around the same part of the game's introductory phase. Our weapon loadout had me wielding a lance, Hikari-chan swinging a greatsword, and Ehrai-chan equipped with a bowgun, a type of long-range weapon.

Hikari-chan's presence in particular was odd. Personally, I thought she was the sort of person to have gotten a lot further into the game by now. When I heard she was actually a novice like Ehrai-chan and me, I couldn't help but be confused. Plus, I was pretty sure I'd gotten a glimpse of her game thumbnail—she'd played it during an endurance stream, as far as I could tell. But upon checking with her before the stream, her game save was *actually* in the beginning of the game, so I figured it was all good and had her come onto this stream as a reliable veteran hunter with plenty of experience from earlier games.

"Um, Awa-chan-senpai," said Ehrai-chan, "keep an eye out behind you,

okay~?”

“Got it! I’ll make sure they don’t get through,” I replied.

“Yeah, yeah!” called out Hikari-chan. “You’re both getting used to things! I’m so happy to have new party members!”

: Yeaaah!

: Awa-chan's getting better

: they're doing great!

At that moment, we were facing down a big frog-like monster. My main equipment consisted of not only my large lance, but a shield that I wielded at the same time, making me slow and bulky. But it was great for defending against enemy attacks—this setup boasted the best guarding capabilities of all possible loadouts.

I was beginning to get the hang of where to place myself and when to move. When the enemy showed an opening, I’d do thrusts, throwing in a sweep here and there, making sure to stick close to the enemy to bring out the lance’s strong points. Since it was still so early in the game, even I could handle enemy attacks.

“Ehrai-chan, I’m kinda surprised you wanted to play *MonSlay*,” I commented. “Aren’t you supposed to be the zookeeper? I mean, on the surface, at least.”

“I was thinking the same thing!” agreed Hikari-chan. “Since we used to call you a zookeeper, once upon a time!”

“Hey, I’m a zookeeper for real,” she replied. “Nothing more, and nothing less~”

“Yeah, but—” the other two of us started.

“I’m sorry, did you not hear me~?”

“Y-Yes, ma’am,” the other two of us said.

Even Ehrai-chan, who had gotten so out of sorts while playing a horror game,

was able to use her “Boss” character well as a trademark routine now. *The way she does it kind of reminds me of myself*, I thought.

“Getting back to the question,” said Ehrai-chan, “I want to get on the bandwagon as much as the next person~ And I don’t want to become a pain in the rear who can’t distinguish fact and fiction~ Although, since capturing monsters alive exists as part of the game, I try to capture as many as I can when I play alone~”

“That’s very admirable of you,” I said.

Hikari-chan whistled. “You’re so mature!”

“No, no, you two have been here longer than me~! Anyway, that’s basically it. Oh! Also, I bought a good, expensive bullet earlier for this~ This is a good chance, so it’s time to fire it,” said Ehrai-chan.

Just as she leveled her bowgun, though, a smaller monster—not the current objective—jumped out into the line of fire. By the time she muttered an “oh,” her expensive bullet had struck the smaller monster instead of the big frog.

“...?” she said. “You *shitstain!* What are you doing in my firing line, goddammit?!”

Hikari-chan and I both squealed in fright. *Th-There she is! The Ehrai Special! Not the keeper of the zoo, but the big boss of the animals!!!*

“How dare you even *think* to show your damn face in my path, you third-rate crony!!!”

“H-Hey, uh, Boss?!” I cried. Her switching fully into boss mode had been entirely unexpected.

She put her weapon away, then ran up to the still-living small monster, using an action only added into the game as a fun bonus—kicking—to attack it directly for almost no damage at all!

“Take this!” she yelled. “Bowgun Kick! Bowgun Kick! Bowgun Kick!”

“Wow!” cried Hikari-chan. “What a new and fun form of martial arts! It’s so cool! I wanna try!”

“This isn’t that kind of game!!!” I exclaimed. “And the bowgun has nothing to

do with it! Boss! Please, calm yerself down a li'l!"

"Haah, haah, haah... I... I'm sorry~"

Somehow my desperate persuasion managed to stop her from engaging in any more madness and bring back the zookeeper. *Phew*, I thought. *That's Live-On for ya. So hard to deal with.*

: she's literally crazy lmaooo

: Should we call the police...?

: If she got arrested and thrown in jail I bet she'd call the prisoners animals and rule over them all

: HAHA

"Umm," said Ehrai-chan, "naturally, what I just did was along the same lines of it being another action the game allows, okay~? Anybody who can't tell the difference between good and bad isn't worthy of calling themselves any kind of leader~"

"Y-Yeah, you're right," I said. "Besides, Live-On would never have hired an *actual* bad guy."

"I bet all the animals in the zoo look at you with respect and worship and fear!" exclaimed Hikari-chan. "You're incredibly charismatic, so I bet you're an amazing leader!"

"Is that a compliment~? In real life, if you ever see me raise my fist, it would be because I found people bullying animals in the worst way possible~"

"She's so cool," said the other two of us in unison.

Anyway, it was time to refocus on the hunt.

"Frogs sure are weird creatures, huh?" I commented.

"Oh?" said Ehrai-chan. "What makes you think that?"

"Well... I guess you could say this about all amphibians, but don't they have this sort of unearthly mystique to them? Like if you told me they came from

outer space, I'd probably believe you."

"Yeah, you're right!" chimed in Hikari-chan. "I was really obsessed with them as a kid, so I'd always catch them to get a closer look!"

With the enemy's attack pattern slowly taking root in our minds, the hunt got less and less shaky, so we naturally started to chat about stuff. I'd only brought up the topic of frogs since the current monster we were hunting was a big one, but Ehrai-chan loved animals of all kinds, so she happily engaged in the conversation.

"There are a lot of different species of frog out there," she explained. "Some have poison, of course. But others carry their eggs on their back, and others can give cries that sound like baby noises~ Also, they're surprisingly tasty."

"Huh?" I said. "You, uh, you can eat them? Frogs?"

"Oh, I've heard of that!" exclaimed Hikari-chan. "Apparently they're delicious and easy to eat, contrary to how they look!"

"You're very knowledgeable, Hikari-senpai," remarked Ehrai-chan. "And eh-*right* you are! For example, bullfrogs may be all over Japan now, but they're actually an invasive species originally brought over as food~"

"It's common knowledge for extreme survival! I can handle everything from frogs to snakes in order to survive in any situation!"

"I'm not sure when that know-how would come in handy in Japan..." I murmured.

: hello this is frog. please eat me

: Oh no, you're not becoming part of Hikari-chan's flesh.
Hop back to the marsh where you belong

: ^ please go back to the south pole yourself

: I want a Budgett's frog but apparently they're pretty hard to raise

: Amphibians and reptiles generally don't grow attached to you, so you need to give them unconditional love to

raise them

: Frogs? You mean what the goddess eats a lot, right?

: You wouldn't happen to live in a god-blessed wonderful world, would you?

: I do get a lot of compliments on how my voice sounds like a frog's

: wait. frog voice, "kaeru" voice...

: Huh, some knowledge really is better left buried

It's fun being carefree when playing video games, but humans, as is their wont, so easily let down their guards. In-game, Hikari-chan—having pressed too hard—ended up driven into a corner of the screen. Plus, the monsters didn't even respond to Ehrai-chan or me. They just zeroed in on Hikari-chan.

"Wait!" she cried. "This might be a little much, even for me!"

Ultimately, she ate a full combo attack, which stunned her character and left her completely open to follow-ups. She quite literally had little birds flying around her head now. *Oh, crap!* I thought. *Hikari-chan is gonna go down at this rate!*

"N-Noooooo!!!!!" she screamed. "I don't want to die! I don't want to go through that hell again!!! Somebody save meeeee!!!!!"

"Hang on, Hikari-chan!" I called. "I'll get you back up!"

"I'll throw a flash~" Ehrai-chan followed up.

I hurried over to Hikari-chan, then attacked her on purpose to knock her out of her dizziness. Meanwhile, Ehrai-chan threw a flash bomb, a tool that distracted enemies with an intense burst of light.

Phew, I thought. Dodged that bullet.

"Th-Thank you," moaned Hikari-chan. "You really saved me there..."

"Not at all," Ehrai-chan replied. "You got a bit hysterical though, didn't you~? We've got plenty of room to mess up, so it's okay if you get defeated once~"

This game was made so that you only failed the quest if your party accumulated three KOs between them. I hadn't thought dying once was that big of a deal either.

"Well, to tell the truth," explained Hikari-chan, "I'm trying to beat the game without dying at all. If I get defeated, I have to delete my save data! This is actually my seventh file! You two seriously saved my life! I love you, I love you! Mwah, mwah!"

The moment those words spilled from her mouth, time stopped for Ehrai-chan and me. "Uh?" we said.

And now time will resume.

"Boss," I said, modulating my tone to be more soldierlike. "Defensive formation. Target in front."

"Roger," replied Ehrai-chan. "I protect the family. The whole family. I'll riddle 'em full of holes!"

"Huhhh?" said Hikari-chan. "What's going on with you? Oh, if you're worried about all that, don't be—if I died, I'd only erase my file after we cleared the quest!"

"That isn't the problem here!!!" the two of us exclaimed in perfect unison.

How does she even think of this stuff?! And why does she go through with it?! Now all the questions I had before the stream make sense!

"Hikari-chan," I said, "I want you to get back to base camp, stat. Go up 256 steps, right 1 step, down 16 steps, and left 32 steps—that's how you get there."

"You make it sound like the Mystery Zone for some reason~" said Ehrai-chan.

"Oh, wow, I remember the Mystery Zone!" exclaimed Hikari-chan. "I got there on a blind playthrough. I had no idea what I was doing, and I kept it that way—I got to the goal using my mind's eye alone! But in the end that file got deleted too, so I guess I'm still inexperienced..."

"Awa-chan-senpai," said Ehrai-chan, "I can take Hikari-senpai into my zoo, if you like~"

"That's fine with me!" I replied.

“Hey, wait, no! I still have some fight left in me—both for video games and for life! In fact, I *want* my save file to get deleted! Only by overcoming countless harsh trials will I become stronger! Don’t be shy—use me as a sacrificial pawn!”

: lmaoooo

: she's ACTUALLY nuts

: One death will very literally end her life huh

: closet mega-masochist. no, the ultimate masochist.

: The energetic member of the group, except she's really a chuunibyou, except she's really an idiot, except she's really just Live-On

“Sweet!” I called out. “Hunt complete! Good job, both of you!”

“Great work~”

“It was great work! But it was also exhausting. Mainly mentally...”

After all that, we were able to clear the entire quest with Hikari-chan alive and well. *I know it was all to protect her save file, I thought, but how long has it been since I got this serious about a game? The last time might have been that home run derby game with the cartoon bear... But yeah, I can really feel a sense of urgency and immersion from this. I could get addicted...to not doing this again, actually. Video games should be enjoyed in a more casual way! Why do you have to put yourself through all these trials, Hikari-chan?*

“Seriously!” continued Hikari-chan. “When I was about to die, I could feel my heart ready to explode! I even forgot to blink since there was so much adrenaline in my head that it was making my brain bug out!”

“If that’s true, then you need to drop the restriction *right now*,” I told her.

“I mean, I get it. It’s really traumatizing when you mess up. But in that very moment, it just... It feels better than anything else I can imagine...”

“Senpai, you are super yabai~”

“You’re talking like some spy who died a million times and got a taste for ecstasy.”

“Bring on the lasers~!”

“My mind grows stronger each time I stumble at a trial—by now it’s basically a diamond, unbreakable by anyone! Ahhh, maybe I’ll add a condition where I have to be butt-naked during the final boss fight. And with the ending in sight, I’d get all that tension, and if I were to die I’d have to start over from the very beginning... It would be the peak of despair... That would be just great!!!”

“Jumping onto perfectly visible land mines is not courage,” I told her.

“But Hikari-senpai is way too abnormal to be stopped by those words~” said Ehrai-chan.

I couldn’t conceal my confusion at the madness my genmate was displaying, but what was I supposed to do about it? *Actually, now that I think about it, Live-On doesn’t have any sane members. At this rate, I’ll end up so far gone that the only friends who will satisfy me are fellow streamers.*

Wait, I thought. I never had any friends outside of Live-On anyway. Aha ha ha ha ha ha... “Gegeh-brwaah...”

“Wh-What’s the matter, Awa-chan-senpai?” stammered Ehrai-chan. “If we had a second spy who’s way too in character, even I don’t know if I’d be able to handle it...”

“Vomiting...” Hikari-chan mused. “Yeah. Yeah! Maybe I could play Long Fit on a totally full stomach, and if I barf, I lose... That might actually work.”

“Don’t do that. Seriously, do *not* barf on stream. It’s all downhill from there.”

“That’s astonishingly convincing coming from you~”

: The veteran has spoken

: She's the girl who ascended to the top of her industry by barfing. She's just built different

: The life-revolutionizing barf ¥10000

: She's the girl who barfed out both the contents of her stomach and all of the seiso within her

: Pff, the seiso wasn't inside her to begin with. She was just plastering it on the outside

: wait. then maybe barfing wouldn't actually be so bad?

: I mean, sure, maybe, as long as you're already a beautiful girl beloved by the gods on the outside

: ah. i see. brb, gonna set up a barf stream

: That total self-confidence of yours... I'm kinda into it

“Hey, Hikari-chan,” I said, “what’s your endgame for any of this, anyway?”

“To become the world’s strongest life-form, obviously!” she replied.

“You had that loaded and ready to go!” I exclaimed. “Then why did you become a VTuber instead of going to a dojo or something?!”

“A VTuber is an electronic life-form. Electronic life-forms are impervious to all attacks. Being impervious to all attacks makes you the strongest in the world. I’m a genius! QED, hence proven or whatever!”

“QQQ, hence definitely *not* proven. Whatsoever.”

“BBQ, I want to eat some meat~”

: If someone is born a person, at least once in their life they'll dream of becoming the strongest life-form alive. A VTuber is a martial artist who aims to become the strongest in the world!

: They call them VTubers because the V stands for Victory

: wow, Vtubers are something huh (unsophisticated reaction)

: I can't tell anymore whether they were born in the

wrong country and time period or if they're lucky they were born in this one

: the zookeeper trying to escape reality XD

“Seriously...” I said. “How did you even get through the interview phase?”

“When I gave them an impassioned speech about how strong I wanted to become, they were like, oh, gotcha! Next thing I knew, I had the job!”

“It’s okay to give up. You’re only human. Awao.”

“Let’s just get onto the next quest, shall we~”

We enjoyed some more hunting after that until the end of the stream. *You know, I thought, it’s pretty strange that I’m more tense doing co-op than single-player, even though the former is supposed to be more fun.*

Still, I supposed that we *had* enjoyed a roaring good time. *I guess it’s a positive memory. But next time, I want to come at the game normally—and calmly. I mean, I doubt the next time is going to be nearly as bad as this was. For today, I’ll get some sleep and look forward to the next collab play.*

Good night...

The next day...

“Kaeru would like some honey, please. After all, Kaeru is a baby.”

“Eheh heh... Kaeru-chan... We finally meet again... It’s me, your mama. Shion-mama is here to see you... I was the moderator during the last collab, so I had to hold it in, but today I’ll make you my little girl for sure...”

“Kon-mashiro, everyone. It’s me, Mashiro Irodori—or you can just call me Mashiron. This is going to be exhausting for sure, so I made a massage reservation for tomorrow.”

Ugh, I thought. Welp, this is bad. Live-On truly was always beyond saving. Time to knock back some StroZero!

: oh god lol what an insane group

: You're not supposed to put four Live-Ons in one place!

: But they have to be in one place. There's something they need to do before going off to slay monsters, remember?

: A party of a baby, a mama, a StroZero, and an illustrator? What the heck happened to put THEM together?

: maybe it's some kind of mixed martial arts?

: Mashiron is gonna die of overwork from the sheer level of tsukkomi she's in for

"Gimme honey," repeated Kaeru-chan. "Baby wants honey. Come on, hurry. Pretty, pretty please."

"You're starting to sound like a certain yellow bear, except way more annoying," remarked Mashiron. "I've only been around you a few times, but I already have a bad feeling about this."

"I'd like some honey too, please," I chimed in. "Some of that sweet, lemon-flavored, fizzy, alcoholic honey you can get real high off of."

"That's not honey, Shuwa-chan. Ugh, I'm already tired being the only tsukkomi here. Shion-senpai, could I get some help?"

"Heeere, Kaeru-chan! There's honey right over here! Come over heeere!"

"Kaeru is scared you mixed something into it, so she respectfully declines."

"But it's Shion-mama's very own honey! You can drink it, right? I'm sure you can drink it. Can't you?"

"Kaeru is now scared of basically everything."

"I can't," said Mashiron. "I can't do this."

Drink StroZero, and...oh wow, oh my! This party makes me want to doubt my eyesight, but now I'm so happy I don't care, woohoo! Time to zero out my brain again and have a rip-roaring good time!

“Look, just get the honey out, understand?” grumbled Kaeru-chan. “Kaeru’s a *baby*, got it? Yeah? You wanna see how the rest o’ society reacts if you bully a *baby*, eh?”

“Hey, is a certain bossy genmate starting to influence her?” asked Mashiron. “Also, I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to give honey to babies.”

“Kaeru informed her viewer-mommies she wanted to be a baby in *MonSlay*, so they told her to say *gimme honey*.”

“I get it. To explain for those who don’t, in the *MonSlay* business, that is a magic phrase that immediately pegs you as a novice player. Well, in most cases it just draws aggro. I think they were fibbing, Kaeru-chan.”

“What?! Waaaahhhh! Mama! They lied to Kaeru... Please comfort her...”

“You heard her, Shuwa-chan,” Mashiron prompted me.

“No,” I said. “*I am...not your mother.*”

“Yes! That’s right! I, Shion-mama, am your true mama! Come to me, Kaeru-chan! Let go of this coldhearted booze-face and come to me!”

“Oh, um... But Mama is Mama, so... Kaeru knows her mama loves dirty jokes and women and can’t help herself around alcohol and cheats on women as easily as she breathes and you think she’s having sex with them but a moment later she’s probably having sex with StroZero, but she’s still my one and only mama...”

“Hey, I take offense to that!” I interjected. “You forgot *and yet she’s somehow really pretty, so she’s actually just one big phishing scam.*”

“Why are you piling more onto yourself?”

Eee! Mashiron’s good old indifferent tsukkomi acts are just the best! It’s like I’ve come back home! I knew it—I think of her just like a normal person thinks of their actual family, huh? The kind of girl who sets you at ease just by being around her!

“Hey, Mashiron,” I said, “I know this is sudden, but what am I to you?”

“StroZero. Why?” she replied.

Did you just hear that? Seriously? I think of her as family, and yet she thinks of me as a can of chuhai you can get for 155 yen! Can you believe it?

“Kaeru thinks of you as Mama.”

“Shion-mama thinks of you as her precious daughter too, even if you are a handful!”



“Ohh!” I said. “That’s good! Really good! Those were the answers I was hoping for! What about you, Mashiron?”

“StroZero. Why?”

“<What the fuuu...>” *Yeah, I get it. We’re not alone, so she’s embarrassed. Yeah. That’s what I’m going with.*

: Isn't it weirder to think of a senpai and a kouhai being a mother and daughter in the first place?

: i mean, you're right. i just didn't notice it because they're so serious about it

: Hello, yes, I've just secured a twenty-something-year-old woman who insisted she's a baby and then threatened her senpai

: Lmao that just sounds like a regular crime

: For some reason I felt love from how quickly Mashiron answered

I was feeling like we could just make this stream an idle chat one and still have a lot of fun, but it was probably best to accomplish our original goal, since that was what the viewers were waiting for. Today, we’d be hunting a monster that went by the name of JiggIhezu. Judging by the reactions in the comments, it was popular amongst the viewers.

“What kind of monster is JiggIhezu?” asked Kaeru-chan. “Kaeru has never heard of it before.”

“I don’t know either,” said Shion-senpai. “But with such a cute name, it must be absolutely adorable! Like, chock-full of collagen!”

“Yeah, me either, woohoo! Hope it’s a monster that’ll make stealing their hymen worth the effort. Wait, Mashiron, you’re a veteran, aren’t you? I’m sure you know what it is.”

“...I mean, I do, but... Right. It’s just what it sounds like—a very, uh, *jiggly*

monster.”

“Oooh!” the rest of us said in unison.

Now I’m even more excited for this! My lance is just about to explode!

Anyway, it was time to start the quest, woohoo!!!

“Announcing the starting lineup for today’s hunt!” I said. “First, we have me, Shuwa! And then Mashiron!”

“Yo.”

“Shion-mama!”

“I’m here!”

“Kaeru-chan!”

“Right!”

“So now we’re going to hold down the Alt key, then press F4. We’re getting out of here,” I instructed.

“Wait! Don’t give up yet!” yelled Kaeru-chan.

: noooo! ahhhn, not the jigglyzu!!!

: Mashiron isn't lying

: It's cute fr too

: shuwa-chan's gonna do it with THAT? well, good luck!

: It's a rite of passage

: The thing that makes me happiest is how much fun Kaeru-chan sounds like she's having. Makes me all warm and cozy...

And so the quest began! While the hunting lifestyle was fulfilling, it was also the life of a bloody butcher. You didn’t get to have monsters that filled that soul-soothing *iyashikei* role. So, we all dashed off to meet the Jigglyhezu. But...

The moment we saw it, the three of us (excluding Mashiron) all stopped dead

in our tracks and fell silent.

I mean, I understand, I thought. That Chinese-dragon-like silhouette I can see up there... That's gotta be the Jigghezu. I get it.

Its whole body is super jiggly, after all. And so moist that it's got weird fluid dripping off it. Plus, it's a perfectly pale beauty—so white you can see the blood vessels through its skin.

Ahh, a moist body lacking coloration, and a jigglyness that reminds me exactly of pudding.

But, you see... It all seems so overdone. It looks grotesque, doesn't it...?

"Yep, saw that coming," said Mashiron. "Quit zoning out. Let's go."

"Wait a minute, Mashiron," I said. "Please explain—"

"Gugyahhhh!!!!!"

"You just shut the heck up!!!" I cried.

Just as I was protesting to Mashiron, who had—without hesitation—charged right in, the Jigghezu noticed us and let out an awful, ear-piercing scream.

Eeeek!!! I just noticed how freaking scary that face is, now that it noticed us! It's like they forgot to put in all the facial features except for the mouth!

"Hey, Mashiron!" I demanded. "How is *MonSlay* getting away with having a monster that looks like a character out of *Taimanin*?! They'd need to rate it R18 and then kids wouldn't be able to play it!"

"I wish you'd compare it to a horror-game character instead..." muttered Mashiron.

"This is Kaeru. Understood, boss! Preparing to press Alt+F4."

"Hey, Kaeru-chan! Don't give up! Believe in the me that believes in you!" I encouraged her.

"That isn't what you said before, mama! Children grow by watching their parents! Say something with more responsibility!"

"Responsibility? I gave up on that the moment I talked about getting hard! If I had to take responsibility for everything I've ever said, I'd have to go to

confession every single day. And eventually the priest in the confessional would flip his shit and start lecturing me before I even confessed to anything! Confessionals? Student guidance offices? What's the difference?!"

"That doesn't have to do with Kaeru! And Kaeru doesn't want to work either! Why does she have to be a stupid hunter?! Babies working?! Society is coming to an end!"

"You're not getting away! Today's the day I rip that thirty-year-old woman out of the baby!"

"Out of the way! Kaeru *is* a baby!"

"I could use some help over here," muttered Mashiron. "You know, actually *fighting*?"

: predictable reaction, also the gold standard

: it's a monslay tradition, tbh

: Shuwachan is the kinda girl who'd drink strozero while praying in church, probably

: Holy Water (but actually StroZero)

: Bishop of the Cardinal Sin of Greed, Shuwachan Strozeronondegomendi

: I bet they'd actually kick her out of the confessional haha

: lmfaoooo

: don't announce your own discharge from the squad lol

: self-service discharge!

Ugh, I thought. Well, we did choose a quest, after all. I feel bad leaving Mashiron on her own. Guess I'll pick my heavy self up and finally join the fray. Oh, and Kaeru-chan managed to get out the bow she's so fond of. That's good.

...Wait. Hold on.

While the two of us started ahead, Shion-mama remained locked in place like a rock. We'd be leaving her behind at this rate.

Come to think of it, she's been totally silent this whole time, despite Kaeru-chan and me being rowdy. I wonder if something happened.

Maybe the mental shock of the jiggly doing the jiggle and yet still not being jiggle was too much for her heart.

That makes sense. Shion-mama's a girly girl. She loves cute things. I get it! I do. It's like buying a game thinking it's Naruto, but it's actually Taimanin...

I know what to do. I already got the achievement for giving Shion-mama anxiety so many times. I have to be a good therapist for her too! By being...a living example of what not to do!

First, I thought about what I usually said to Shion-mama at times like these. Let's see...

"Shion-mama, cheer up!" I thought. "If you do it with the slippery thing coming out of the Jigglyhezu, you'll be three thousand times more sensitive! You'll not only twitch, you'll twist, and flop, and hop around like a fish just pulled out of the water! We'll have ourselves a contest—which of us can crawl the fastest while spasming with pleasure?"

Great, I thought. Then I just have to flip that around. I'm sure it'll end up being like a voice from God Himself, and it'll recover her mental state in a flash!

"Shion-mama, cheer up!" I thought. "If you do it with the slippery thing coming out of the Jigglyhezu, you'll have zero sensitivity. You'll probably feel nothing, no matter what you do. Oh, I know. Let's both lose all our sensitivity and just, y'know, zone out. We'll have ourselves a contest—which of us can make our lives empty the fastest?"

Ha ha, now I feel like one of those dull-eyed heroines who only says depressing stuff! I thought. Which won't work. I have to think of something better...

But as I racked my brain looking for good jokes, Shion-mama suddenly murmured softly, "It's so cute..."

"What," said the other three of us in unison.

And, mysteriously, I thought I could hear a sort of *passion* in her voice...

“Umm... Shion-mama?” I asked with much consternation. “What did you just say?”

Then, in a complete one-eighty from her previous silence, she began to speak with total excitement. “Jigglhezu-chan is so *cute*! Look at it—it’s chubby, and kind of dumb-looking, and a crybaby... It’s just like a little baby...”

I was already doubting my own ears, but then Shion-mama—her gaze passionate and enraptured—gazed once again at the Jigglhezu.

What.

“Hey, Kaeru-chan,” I said. “I feel like I’ve seen that strange monster before in a 3D ero anime. Does it still look like a baby to you?”

“Kaeru doesn’t know anything about ero anime,” she replied, “but she cannot sincerely call that creature a baby. The word *baby* is reserved for adorable children one must care for, like Kaeru.”

“We wouldn’t normally call *you* a baby either,” I shot back. “You’re just an adult who needs someone to take care of them.”

“What are you saying, mama? Someone is only an adult if they’re independent—in other words, if they don’t need anyone to take care of them. Since Kaeru will never ever be able to live by herself, I believe that places her quite far from the concept of *adult*.”

“Doesn’t it make you sad, saying something like that about yourself?”

“It does not. After all, Kaeru is a baby.”

: I'm really worried about Shion-mama's mental health

: I can't believe she'd understand the charms of *MonSlay*'s token moe character. One day, I'd like to drink Pale Extract with her.

: Can I keep up? With the speed of the world Shion-mama lives in?

: If any man DID keep up, that would basically be a crime already, so turn back while you still can

: but maybe she's an otokonoko mama

: is she a man? a child? a mama? make up your mind people!!!!

: LMAO

: Man I gotta say Jigglhezu's fight bgm is godlike

: there's no bgm! it's literal silence.

: Jigglhezu is adorable. I will accept arguments. But I don't have the ears to hear them

: damn what a skilled play

: Background music is there to make scenes pop. but here, the idea is to not have any at all to make the main subject really conspicuous. basically the picasso of the music world if you ask me.

: That time the entire art industry got really mad at some guy

: It has a really good chorus line though

: WHAT CHORUS LINE?????



“We’re not getting anywhere like this,” I said. “Kaeru-chan, help me drag Shion-mama back into our world!”

“Kaeru understands,” she replied. “We will bring her back from the world of madness into the world of babies and have her become Kaeru’s mama.”

“I’ll use this chance to drag her into the world of StroZero and make her one of my comrades. Plus it’ll contribute to sales!”

“Sounds like hell either way to me,” Mashiron cut in.

: it's not working! they're all crazy! somebody do something!

: I love how calmly Mashiron butts into the convo

: They're helping each other now, but once their common enemy is gone, they'll probably be enemies with each other since they're all so different

: what is this, the cold war?

: Yes, a war in a very coldhearted society. hence cold war.

I'm at bat first! “Shion-mama,” I said, “look more closely. That monster is nowhere near cute! It would eat you alive if you so much as got anywhere near it!”

“It’s a mother’s mission to become sustenance for her child! I would never abandon a child, no matter what they looked like!”

“Shit. You *do* treat a trashy, booze-loving sexual-harassment woman like a baby. Wait, no! Kaeru-chan would be sad if you cheated on her, you know!”

“Huh? Really?”

“Yeah, really! Right, Kaeru-chan?”

“*Ogyaaahhh! Ungyaaahhh!!!*” Kaeru-chan cried like a baby.

“She sounds just like the Jigghezu,” I muttered.

“Oi. Mama. Don’t betray Kaeru,” said Kaeru-chan to me.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” I replied. “Shion-mama, look, you’re making Kaeru-chan cry.”

“You’re right...” said Shion-mama. “Child neglect is never, ever the right choice... Okay, I’ve got it!”

She does?! Did it work?!

“In that case, I’ll make Kaeru-chan be Jigghezu’s little sister from now on! Now I can dote on both of you at the same time as sisters!”

“Hey, good for you, Kaeru-chan,” I said. “Not only did you protect your baby status, you even have a character of the strongest possible class: little sister but not by blood!”

“Whose side are you on anyway, mama?!” cried Kaeru-chan. “Being sisters with a monster like that is essentially equivalent to employment!”

“You hate the concept of employment way too much.”

“Kaeu believes that if she were to work, everything would be lost.”

“Gugyah!!!!”

“Ahaaahhn, that voice is resounding in my womb!!!!”

Oh no. Oh no! Shion-mama might have already gone past the point of no return! Gah. Now that it’s come to this, I’ll just have to use force! “Kaeu-chan!” I called out. “We’re joining Mashiron and putting down the Jigghezu as quickly as we can! We have to put a stop to Shion-mama!”

“Then Kaeru shall show you her bowmanship.”

“Heeeyyy!!! Don’t you dare attack my beloved Jigghezu-chan!!!!” screamed Shion-mama.

“Wait! Shion-mama, please don’t get in the way of Kaeru’s attack!”

“Did she just body-block Kaeru’s arrow?!” I exclaimed.

“Kind of feels like there’s a second enemy in the quest now,” commented Mashiron. “But maybe I’m just tired.”

After that, we ended up forced into an arduous battle (mostly due to external factors), but managed to clear the quest successfully and return Shion-mama to normal (although whether “normal” meant “sane” was up for debate).

I was pretty sure the game’s developers would have been shocked to find out that adding just one person to the team had made our hunt all the more exhausting. Still, to me, our escapades were part of the fun—with everyone playing the game together. The game itself was undeniably fun to begin with, so I was excited to play more of it.

In conclusion, even in the MonSlay world, Live-On’s gonna Live-On.

Shuwa-Chan’s Castella Responses

All right, we’re here! Today’s gonna be another day of Shuwa-chan streaming! Tonight’s stream would mainly be a zatsudan—alone, for once, after all the recent collabs—while I answered Castellas.

Going alone was laid-back and fun. Solo streams let me relax pretty well, so maybe they didn’t feature the usual craziness. Still, they let me feel closer to the viewers than collab streams, so I liked them just as much. *Kind of like I’m collabing with all the people watching.*

Still, though, I thought. Speaking of solo streams. It’s already been a little over a week since Seisama lost her monetization. She started streaming again, but only by herself, never with anyone else. I guess that’s concerning me. Maybe I’ll invite her to do something soon.

“Pshhh! I’m here, everyone! Shuwa-chan, at your service! Woohoo!”

: woohoo (said like mashiron)

: It's starting it's starting!

: Lately I've been having trouble sleeping if I don't listen to Shuwa-chan's voice. Thanks for doing this stream

: would that technically be alcoholism?

: Please, don't call the ones who fr love Shuwa-chan alcoholics...

“Let’s do some Castellás, like we always do. I’m Shuwa-chan. Those stories tonight on Zero Minutes. First up is this one!”

: "those storiesth (*hic*) on zero minutesh (*hic*)"

: Whoa, this news program sounds pretty Strong

: I am 100% sure she literally just thought of that

: so it's already over???

: "those stories (*barf*) on gero minutes (*streaming accident*)"

Q: Have some StroZero! It’s as fun as the funlance!

“When are they gonna add StroZero-chan as a buddy?”

Q: I accidentally put my StroZero in the freezer...

I know I have to rescue it quick, but I’m too scared to open the freezer door.

Please give me the courage to open the freezer and save my StroZero!

Btw, I put them in there three days ag--

“Break the can, pull out the contents, shave it down with something. And just like that, you have a somewhat bitter lemon-flavored shaved ice for adults! Put your favorite syrup on it and you’re ready to go! Credit to Zero-Michelin Star Chef Shuwa.”

Q: I’d like to see you try and make your own StroZero by

buying vodka, lemons, artificial sweeteners, and liquid nitrogen. Using company money, of course. That way you could whip some up at any time. It would basically be loli StroZero you can enjoy whenever. And they'd be legal lolis too, who are born as adults! You could lick them and drink them all you want!!!

.....

I think an older-sister loli would be really great.

"Hmm... I feel like StroZero is more than just the sum of its ingredients, you know? There's something special in it. Like when your girlfriend cooks for you—there's something so soul-satisfying about it apart from the flavor, right? That's why I want to drink StroZero created by my beloved Moontory-chan. Also, that aside, older-sister lolis are one of the world's intangible cultural heritages. A loli onee-san who can fluster me real good? I'm so hard right now."

Q: I just thought of something because I'm sick in bed right now. Which of the other Live-On members would you want to be a bedside nurse for you? And how would you want them to care for you?

"I'll set the scene. I wake up and open my heavy eyelids. And there I see Chami-chan, looking at me with worry on her face, her hand gripping mine. I say, *But I'll catch a cold!* And then Hikari-chan says, *I'm the strongest! Colds mean nothing to me!* and leans in quickly for a kiss. I'm surprised, but I close my eyes. A few seconds later, she releases me and I open them back up. And then I see a flushed Mashiron, but an expression of mischief is on her face. That's when I finally feel it: true bliss."

: how the heck would a strozero buddy even fight...

: How much are you going to mess with the michelin star system XDD

: I never thought I'd hear someone talk about mass-produced canned drinks on the same level as homemade cooking from your girlfriend

: for that last castella, could you PLEASE just pick one character to use

: **LMA000 three people playing a single role, such chaos**
¥2525

: You could have just said you wanted your three genmates to take care of you. Why'd you have to cram them all into one person?

“Also, whoever sent that Castella, I hope you’re okay. I’ll do my best on my stream to try and cheer you up! But real talk, it’s not my fault most of these Castellans are StroZero-related, so give me a break!!! They’re not even Castellans anymore—they’re a place to defend my StroZero one-liner title. And yet you’re throwing StroZero at me instead of Castellans? Madness, I tell you.”

Q: Tell the truth. How far have you gotten with Mashiron?

“Mwa ha ha ha! Our hearts are perfectly linked now! As proof, we were just talking the other day, and I don’t even have to tell her when I don’t have time to talk, or I’m tired, or anything else! I bet she loves me so much she can even read my mind at this point! Ahh, how embarrassing, having her wiretapping my heart!”

: teetee!

: you're embarrassed? i didn't know you could do that

: She's so insane normally that I doubt anyone wiretapping her heart would hear anything different

: She takes wearing your heart on your sleeve to a whole different level

: oh i get it. as long as you say what you're thinking beforehand, it can't count as eavesdropping. It's like that expression, letting your flesh be cut in order to sever the opponent's bones. What a novel way of preventing people from eavesdropping

: you'd get both your flesh and bones cut in that case, woohoo!

Mashiro Irodori: I can't read her mind.

: lmaoooo that was a fast denial

“Oh, you’re so shy and bashful, Mashiron. What a handful! Look, I’ll think of something really nice, so try reading my mind. Just give it a try because you love me! What I’m thinking is gonna make you feel as soft and warm as mashed mashi-mashiron. You’ll be so happy. Give it a try!”

:

:

:

: LMA000 no matter how long you wait, Mashiron won't answer

: I bet she went home XD

“No. It can’t be. Mashirooon? Heeey! Wiretap my heart right fucking now! My feelings won’t have anywhere to go otherwise! What am I supposed to do with them?!”

: omg i cannot with the whole "wiretap my heart right now" thing loool

: a mentally unstable, occult-loving, wiretap-desiring girl

: talk about a bizarre adventure?

: I think we'll all be happier now that your feelings can't go anywhere.

: The feelings were probably nothing good anyway XD

: I want to hear Shuwa-chan's linked-heart ASMR

: yeah hey me too

: It's supposed to be the sound of her heart (kokorone) and yet all I hear is carbonation

: I want to hear StroZero-chan's linked-heart ASMR too!

: Wait, I want to hear SANDWICHED StroZero-chan and Shuwa-chan linked-heart!

: linked-heart sandwich sounds like some kind of moe ero game title

: strozero chan wouldn't have a heartbeat though. it doesn't even have a heart

: is it like Arrancar?

: no, it's like an engine

: both of those are wrong!!!

: StroZero-chan doesn't show much emotion and comes off as cold at first, but once you get to know her, she turns into a kuudere

: treating strozero like a character is so weird, i'm sorry...

: StroZero is an honored third-gen member of Live-On, after all!

“Fine, I don’t care! You’ve got me all riled up. So I’m going to expose the loving words I wanted to tell Mashiron to the whole world! Listen to me. Here they are: *The zookeeper’s boobs are Live-On’s gang boss, and Mashiron’s are its*

cutting board."

: AND IT'S MAKING FUN OF HER LMFAO

: That's why I said we'd all be happier if you kept those feelings bottled up...

Mashiro Irodori: Okay, I'm mad now. Next time, when I do an illustration of you, I'm going to gouge out both of your boobs.

: ah the old mother-daughter arguing

: <3 Mashiron sulking when someone says her boobs are small

: if she had any, she wouldn't be mashiron anymore!

"Oh, found ya, Mashiron! I knew you were still here! You're such a tsundere. Don't worry. That was a lie just now. In reality, I just thought the sweetest words ever thought at you! You're practically drowning in love now!"

Mashiro Irodori: Going to sleep now.

: i see the delusions are going strong

: Mashiron HAS to be blushing now!

: This is the research team. We will not accept any result other than her blushing.

: please do actual research

Alice Soma: I can read Awayuki-dono's mind as well! She says, "Alice-chan is just as cute as StroZero is"!

: Alice-chan, are you sure you aren't just reading your own mind?

: lol... the fact that that's a compliment of the highest order

: we're beyond a field of w's now. we're in frenzy plant territory

Hareru Asagiri: I read her mind. It was...spicy.

: Harerun?!

: You can read her mind?!?!

: I thought it was a lie, but I guess a genius like Harerun could do it, right?

: tell us! please, tell us! we'll do anything!

“Hareru-senpai, please respect your kouhai’s privacy, okay?”

Hareru Asagiri: Roger

: Shuwa-chan, maybe you should start by respecting your own privacy

: If she had to silence her, it must have been REALLY spicy!!!

“Oh, right. Now that you’re here, I feel like I never actually asked. Wanna sex?”

: omg she's literally crazy lol

: She propositioned as easily as she breathed. You might have missed it, but I didn't.

Hareru Asagiri: Never thought you'd ask me that with the same levity you'd ask someone to go to the convenience store with you. I'll have to grab Sei-sei and get her to sub in for me.

: It flowed from her so naturally. Any girl would have gone doki doki

: doki doki! (i've gotta call the police!)

: That was so smart. They've gotta start putting that in health and physical education textbooks from now on. Boys of the world take heed!

: They'll have to take the term "declining birth rates" off of Wikipedia by tomorrow

: The World of Lost Virginity

: Sounds like the setting of some ero manga that's just a collection of color illustrations

: police! hello??? police??????

: Quota? Fulfilled.

Getting a little off track after my beloved Mashiron and Hareru-senpai showed up. But it's time to get back to the Castellas! "Let's see... Here's the next Castella!"

Q: Who was your first anime crush?

Mine was Tomoyo-chan from Cardcaptor Sakura.

"Now that's a question," I said. "I'm into a *lot* of anime characters. Who was my first crush, though...? Who was it for all of you?"

: mine? rei ayanami. that was the moment i became an otaku for life

: Euphie from Code Geass. I think she was my first love.

: You just wanted to say that line lmao

: Chibimaruko-chan. The way her bangs look like crocodile teeth is so cute. I want her to eat me.

: ????????

: that's a very specialized fetish??

“Ahh, anime discussions always get so exciting! As for me... I think it was probably Ai-chan from *Detective Conan*.”

: oh. you know i can kinda see that

: Yeah, that's a weird thing but I fully get it

: Are you fr

: The OG character that "awakened" all the boys

: yeah! our sex ed teacher!

: Guess it takes all sorts...

: I'd like some praise for watching that show with only the purest of feelings

: She just blurts out a female character and literally no one is surprised about it XD

: Are you a lolicon?

“D-Don’t call me a lolicon! We’re talking about when we were kids! I mean. While she *was* originally an adult, that ringing voice and her movements and gestures were all so feminine! You shouldn’t be allowed to have kid characters be that sexy. But I was the same at the time: packed away in a small child’s body. I felt a weird sense of kinship with her, so I guess that’s what did it.”

: don't turn into one of those fast-talking otakus now lolol

: That's rough, buddy

: tbh i get it, but hearing her say it is like. That's rough, buddy

: Backtracking real fast there lmao

: I spotted a man dressed in black making a suspicious deal!!! I was so engrossed in watching the deal that I... I didn't notice his other friend coming up behind me... He fed me an aphrodisiac, and the next thing I knew... My crotch was absolutely swelling!

: stop trying to introduce her to BL doujinshi

"I was just trying to answer the Castella honestly... Whatever, next question..."

Q: "Geroro March"

Gero! Gero! Gero! [Barf! Barf! Barf!]

Iza haite~ Risuna'a shinryaku seyo [And now we vomit~ Conquer the viewers~]

Geggeroggero~! [Barf-bararf-bararf~!]

Sake motte haishingo ni wa itsumo nomu [Booze in hand, always drinking after streams]

-> "Ki wo tsuke~! Me wo samaseeeee!" [-> "Attention! Sober uuuup!"]

Awayuki haishin kiriwasure [Awayuki forgets to turn off the stream]

Asa me ga same, denwa kakaru [In the morning she gets up, gets a call]

Gero hakinagara haishin kiru [And turns the stream off while barfing]

Risuna'a no hannou, dou daro [How did the viewers react?]

Nanja kora, yabai ne, torendo ichi-i! [What the heck? That's crazy! Top trending!]

“Oh my God, I love this so much. But it’s all wrapped up in the Castella itself. How am I supposed to respond? Oh well, guess I’ll sing!”

: It's just the words, but I can literally hear those rhythms in my head, it's brilliant

: Omg she literally just started singing lmao

: new theory: Shuwa-chan is an alien

: Wait. You mean we thought she was from Earth?

: Was there a Geroro in the story...?

: I feel like he was the captain in the anime...

: wowww, that show was so funny. so many parodies and references. I should rewatch it

“Now that I think of it, Alice-chan talks kind of like the sergeant, doesn’t she? Wouldn’t *she* be the alien, then?”

: oh wait! wait...

: You know too much.

Alice Soma: I am from the planet Deviluke! I've come to Earth to get married to you, Awayuki-dono!

: Isn't that one of the planets Samus destroyed?

: You are a creature that can't be allowed to exist!!!

“Talk to me again after you’ve grown a proper tail.”

Q: If you were ever going to do an original song, would it be super emo with all of your singing ability behind it (for Awa-chan) or an electronic song packed full of memes (for Shuwa-chan)?

“Both, to tell the truth... An original song, huh? That would be pretty cool. A song just for me. Which would you all want to listen to?”

: the electronic one! i bet you'd record the entire drum part out of the sounds coming out of strozero

: The snares can be pshhh, the hi-hats can be clinking empty cans, the toms can be hitting partially full cans, and the bass can be shuwa-chan's barfing voice clip!

: That sounds more like a StroZero advertisement than an original Shuwa-chan song...

: I love how we're just assuming sounds that come out of Shuwa-chan are part of the StroZero sound lol

: I'd like the super emo one, I think. Awa-chan's good at singing, so she'd probably do great with any genre tbh

: Yeah. She sings from her liver, like you're supposed to

: That must be the "bowel voice" Yamadera-chan was talking about

“Whoa, that’s a lot of suggestions!” I paused. “I know. What about a collab song between Awa and Shuwa?! Two great tastes that taste great together!”

: A GENIUS HAS APPEARED

: Heck yeah, I want to hear that!

: would it be like shuwa being the boke and awa being the tsukkomi?

: A dream collab

: That would be awesome!!!

Chat suddenly sped way up. *I guess singing is pretty popular, huh?* I thought I'd been trying my hand at all sorts of stuff, but this was making me realize there was still a lot I hadn't yet experienced. *Yeah. Maybe I'll talk to management and figure something like that out!*

Q: What's the most shocked you've ever been?

As for the next Castella... *Okay, I thought. This is gonna require a journey into my memories. Hmm... Let's see...*

"The first thing that comes to mind is me forgetting to turn off my stream, but I'm sure you all know that at this point... Oh! The SEGA person, I guess. That was a huge shock!"

: i mean you were so shocked you barfed lmao

: Just that one fact is way too funny by itself XD

: SEGA person?

: a mysterious new character appears!

: You mean the game company?

"Yeah, that's right. I guess you wouldn't know what I'm talking about just from that, though. I'll explain everything in order, woohoo!"

: okay!

: Ready and waiting!

: If it's about Shuwa-chan, it's gotta be some crazy story LOL

: When she does solo streams, she's 100% a comedian and the games don't matter hahaha

: Waku waku! ¥211

“All right. Listen to this...”

It had happened before I joined that exploitative company, back when I was still a high school student sparkling with all the bright, groundless imaginings of hope for the future. One day on a weekend, I’d invited two good friends to hang out in the shopping district, so we were on the bus from our neighborhood heading that way. This was all a pretty normal scene; none of the bus’s passengers stood out particularly or anything.

But there was one man wearing a suit sleeping comfortably in the seat behind and across from mine; since nobody was sitting next to him, he was using the window as a backrest and headrest. And the one word he said on that bus instantly dragged me into the world of unreality.

“SE~GA~ (beautiful voice)”

The others on the bus all gave a surprised start. Everyone had heard that sound clip when you booted up SEGA games or saw a commercial for it. And that sleeping man had just said it perfectly—absolutely perfectly—as though the sound itself had come straight off a CD.

Everyone turned around to look at the man out of reflex, of course, but after seeing that he was asleep, they turned back to face forward.

But peace would not return to the bus, for now there was a very strange sense of tension wafting through the air.

Why SEGA?

He was sleeping, so how did he produce such a clear, crisp voice?

Was he a secret agent for SEGA? Could he have actually been Segata Sanshiro himself?

The Mega Drive was basically a Roomba, you know?

Wait, but what kind of dream must he have been having to produce that kind of sleep-talk?

Every single one of my thoughts became dominated by SEGA as I considered

all the questions I suddenly had. But I couldn't find the right answers—and eventually, that gave way to fear of the unknown. Everyone else on the bus had odd looks on their faces, their spines were frozen straight up, and their brows were beginning to sweat cold beads.

Fortunately, the driver—while also surprised—managed to keep driving the bus just fine, so after a short time we arrived at the next stop. But during that time, nobody on the bus said a single word. Even my friends and I, all sitting next to each other, strangely couldn't speak at all. We just sat there, our eyes forward, petrified.

As the bus pulled into the stop, the tension would finally lessen a bit—because the intercom announcing the stop had woken the sleeping SEGA man up.

It was just like someone returning to their senses after being possessed by a ghost. Audible sighs of relief filled the bus, for everyone thought the man's awakening meant his SEGA-self had gone away.

...But then it happened. Several people who knew nothing about what was happening on the bus got on at the stop, and one of them headed over to the still-groggy man who had just been sleeping. And then...

“Excuse me, could I sit here?”

“SE~GA~ (beautiful voice)”

“Huh?”

Everyone on the bus cried out, startled, as our world descended into darkness once again. All the passengers turned back and stared at the man again, their jaws practically on the floor. The person who had asked if they could sit down stood there in a daze, not knowing what to do.

“...Huh?”

Finally, even the man himself was surprised—he hadn't understood what it was he'd just said.

...And so, my friends and I spent the rest of our trip locked in that strangest of circumstances...

“And that’s what happened,” I finished. “What did you think of that, everyone?”

: I'm imagining it and it's just so surreal LOL

: XDDD none of it made any sense and you didn't explain anything

: Was that a collab of a very bizarre adventure and drunken rambling?

: What we thought of that: "Huh?"

: Who the hell was that guy lmaoooo

As I’d expected, the end of the story met with confusion and laughter fusing together into absolute chaos in the chat.

“I really don’t know who he was either...” I said. “My personal theory is that he was doing some kind of stealth advertising for SEGA.”

: Don't make him sound like a spy lol

: Is this how stealth marketing works?

: I mean, nobody on the bus could think about anything but SEGA, so it was pretty successful advertising if you ask me

: it was probably just a sega nerd (trust me i'm a detective)

: I would have burst out laughing if I'd been there XD

“Hey, don’t get me wrong—it was super scary! You don’t run into situations like that very often, where what you’re seeing is completely outside of your own brain’s ability to understand. It was fear of the unknown! I literally got

goosebumps...”

And that was the story of the biggest shock I’d ever received—at least that I could think of right now.

But at the time, I had no idea. The story had been told, and it would lead me to be marked for an even greater surprise in the future...

The Mission to Retake Seisama’s Monetization

It was the day of my face-to-face meeting with Suzuki-san. The meeting itself ended without any issues, and then we went out and had lunch together. But as I was finally about to leave, I realized I’d left something in the office. So we both went back and I grabbed what I’d forgotten. And then, as I was about to *actually* go home this time, I spotted a familiar face sitting on a bench at the end of the hallway outside the offices.

“Huh?” I said. “Shion-senpai?”

“Yes?” came the reply. “Oh! Awayuki-chan! Hello there. It’s been a long time since we met offline like this! Are you here for a meeting?”

“I am. Well, actually, I came back to pick up something I accidentally left at the meeting.”

“Oh, no! You have to be better than that, Awayuki-chan! You don’t look panicked, so maybe you got away unscathed today. But even just one misplaced object can really affect you in a negative way!”

“You’re right, I suppose. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“So I was thinking I’d stick with you for everything you have planned from now on, just to make sure you don’t forget anything else! Hand me your schedule!”

“I don’t want to.”

“What a crisp, refreshing refusal. It almost felt *good*. You really surprised me, you know. But wait, didn’t you just say you’d keep it in mind?!”

“Shion-mama, I did. But more important is my liver. And do you know what I

keep in there?”

After a pause, she ventured, “StroZero?”

“Shuwa-chan.”

“You keep Shuwa-chan in your liver?!” exclaimed Shion-senpai, leaning forward.

Starting to have fun now, I started to proudly explain. “She’s sealed inside my liver right now. Think of her like the tailed beast from *Naruto*. When I drink StroZero, it flows into my liver, which returns her power to her, and the seal comes undone.”

“I don’t think the tailed beast was sealed in his *liver*, though.”

“Anyway, what I’m saying is it doesn’t matter *what* I keep in my mind, what with all the shuwa-shuwa in my liver.”

“You like coming up with really weird logic sometimes, huh?”

“But aren’t two-faced characters super cool? I feel like they’re generally popular.”

“Their popularity comes from a positive gap in their personalities.”

“Mine isn’t positive?”

“Shuwa-chan’s gap goes in a negative direction! It would be like Vegeta and Goku fusing and somehow ending up as Nappa!”

“That *would* be a tragedy. Talk about fusion disasters... By the way, what do you think would show up if Nappa fused with Nappa?”

“Nanappappa?”

“That just sounds like Nappa’s dad!”

“And I’m the mommy!”

“Your viewers aren’t going to let you get away with that. Your chat will blow up about it. Also, all that gap stuff? We’re in Live-On. You *can’t* just be talking about me. Hasn’t *everyone* gone crazy in a negative way beyond their original settings?”

“I guess not. You’re all such handfuls, you are!”

“Hey, you’re part of this merry group too, you know. Anyway, jokes aside, I really will be careful not to forget anything.” Although we’d pretty naturally lapsed into idle conversation after saying hello, I suddenly wondered what Shion-senpai was doing at the office. “Are you here for a meeting too?” I asked.

“Yep,” she replied. “Mine is done too, though, just like yours. But Seisama came with me, and she’s still not out. I’m waiting for her.”

“Oh, right. Last time I met you, you were together.” I paused. “How is she? From your perspective, I mean.”

“Are you talking about the monetization?”

“Yes.” As far as I knew, Shion-senpai was the person Seisama was closest with. Maybe she could see something I couldn’t. And since I’d run into her anyway, there was no harm in asking.

Shion-senpai folded her arms and seemed to think for a few moments. Then, in a troubled voice, she answered, “I’m kind of worried! But Seisama, well... She’s passive when it comes to herself, like she doesn’t want to show weakness or something. So she won’t tell me anything.”

“She won’t even talk to *you*?”

“Nope! And when we met up today, she just acted like nothing’s happened, like she’s not worried about anything. Ugh. I *know* it’s all pretend.”

“I see...” She seemed mad at Seisama, but also clearly worried. And considering that, the incident must have affected Seisama in no small way.

“It’s just that I can’t say I have much certainty either.”

“Wait, really?”

“Yeah. Seisama used to joke a lot about losing her monetization. Once before, off stream, I asked her what she’d do if she actually lost it. She told me she’d cross that bridge if she came to it, and that she’d just have as much fun as she could in the moment, since that’s who she is. And she wasn’t lying about any of that.”

Hmm... I thought. In that case, are we still off the mark? This is getting pretty

hard to understand...

“Maybe she’s not worried about the monetization itself, but more...”
mumbled Shion-mama.

“What? What did you just say?” I asked to try and get her to repeat herself, but at that exact moment, a nearby door opened and Seisama came out. Apparently, her meeting was finished.

“My apologies for the wait, Shion-kun.” She paused, seeing me. “What’s this? Hello there, Awayuki-kun. I didn’t realize you were here too.”

“Hello,” I replied. “I happened to bump into Shion-senpai, so we were having a chat.”

“Ah, I see, I see,” she said. “I’m glad she wasn’t bored while she waited, then. My thanks. What were you chatting about?”

“About Nappa the Saiyan,” I said.

“Oh, about Namihei’s battle mode?”

“No, um, that’s a totally, completely different person!”

“Wait, but isn’t Nappa just Namihei, except he’s so angry that the single hair on the top of his head came off?”

“No, they just have similar heads. Their bodies and faces are basically two completely different species. Also, Namihei still has a hair on the back of his head.”

“But it came out, right?”

“You’re attaching a lot of possibility to that single hair, you know.”

“Namihei: ‘This is some good dirt for growing Saibamen.’”

“No, he would never say that. Please, I don’t want to see Namihei talking about planting Saibamen like he’d plant flowers in his garden.”

Hmm, I thought. Even talking to her directly like this, I can’t really see anything different about her. She’d probably die if she didn’t joke around—she’s acting the same as always. Still, maybe she had felt a little different for a moment as she’d come out of that room. But I hadn’t met her offline too many times, so I

couldn't be sure.

"That took longer than usual," said Shion-senpai, sounding a little confused. "Did they say something to you?"

"Oh, we were just talking about monetization stuff," explained Seisama. "Gave me one huge boner, let me tell you."

"I've never heard of a weirder way to get yourself off," muttered Shion-senpai. "Anyway, were they mad at you?"

"Not exactly? Actually, management is doing a lot of asking the platform about why my monetization got revoked. They're in the middle of working on the problem."

"Really?! That's great!"

"Well, I'm grateful, of course. I'm just sorry it caused such a big fuss." Seisama offered an embarrassed smile.

"But won't you be in trouble if you don't get it back soon?" I asked.

"Well, sure, naturally. But when we talk about Seisama... Well, there's a line, and she's constantly jumping side-to-side like it's gym class. At this point, I feel like simply losing my monetization lets me make it into a lighthearted joke."

"So you've finally come out and said it," I remarked. "I asked you this a little when we last talked. You just want everyone else to mess with you and laugh about the whole thing, don't you?"

"Yeah, that's right. I mean, I'll get it back eventually. It's just that, considering how the rest of you are, getting you to make it into a joke isn't an easy proposition..."

"Huh?" I said. "Why not? If you're giving me the go-ahead, I'll gladly mess with you to the ends of the earth. It'll be a good way to blow off all my steam."

"I suppose she's right," agreed Shion-senpai. "And I have so many things I need to say to you—as a mama and as a friend. This is a great opportunity!"

"You're..." Seisama trailed off. "Are you being serious about this?"

I gave her a confused look. "Is there a problem?"

“What exactly do you think is getting in the way of that?” asked Shion-senpai. “That’s what we don’t understand.”

For a few moments, Seisama’s eyes widened. She seemed *actually* surprised at our responses. But then she burst out laughing, looking a little embarrassed. “You’re all so nice, you know that? But one day, you’ll understand.”

Both of us looked at her, baffled. Seisama, however, left us with those implication-riddled words, snapped back to her usual behavior, and started walking to the offices’ exit.

My head tilted in perplexity, I figured I’d follow her, but then I heard a strange groan from Shion-senpai next to me, which stopped me. “Shion-senpai? What’s wrong?”

“I don’t like this,” she replied.

“Huh?”

“What is with that attitude? Like she *likes* knowing everything and not telling us! She needs to stop acting cool!”

“Whoa!” Shion-mama was actually *pissed*. Her voice was still low enough that it wouldn’t reach Seisama, but this was the first time I’d ever heard her so angry.

“I saw that sunken face she had when she left the room!” she added.

“You did too? That seemed a little weird to me too.”

“If we both saw it, then there’s no doubt! But with the way she’s acting, she won’t tell us anything... Anyway, she started acting weird when her monetization got revoked, right? You know what, I don’t *care* what’s going on in that head of hers. Now that it’s come to this, I’m going to crush the problem! I’ll resolve it for her if it kills me!”

“Sh-Shion-senpai?” *You’re starting to freak me out here!*

“Hm?” said Seisama. “What’s wrong, you two? Still need something from the office?”

“Hey! Seisama!” shouted Shion-senpai.

“Hm? What is it? Why the angry face?”

“Right now! We’re borrowing an office room and having a meeting to figure out how to get your monetization back *right now!*”

Seisama and I cried out, “Huh?!” in unison.

But Shion-senpai clearly would not brook any argument to her sudden declaration...

“We will now begin our meeting to plan out how to retake Seisama’s monetization!” declared Shion-senpai.

“Heck yeah! I’ve been waiting for this!” Hareru-senpai cheered.

“Wait, Shion-kun. Did you hear what I was saying before? About how I don’t want to make a huge deal out of this if I don’t have to?” Seisama reminded her.

“Shut up! I’ve had enough of your narcissistic bullshit!” Shion-sama cried.

“Yeah! You and your anal-cissistic bullshit!” Hareru-senpai repeated.

“You’re only *saying* that in a cool way, but you’re just a high-level fetishist, aren’t you, Hareru-kun?”

I couldn’t help pointing out, “Seisama, I think *you’re* the one trying to phrase things in too cool a way. ‘High-level fetishist’? We just call them perverts.”

As I spoke, I looked around again at the people at the table, narrowing my eyes at them without meaning to. After her declaration, Shion-senpai had grabbed Seisama’s hand and dragged her into a borrowed room. I’d come along with them since that had seemed like the thing to do. And now we—including me—had actually started a weird meeting.

I didn’t have anything going on after this, I thought, so it’s not like this’ll interfere with anything, but still...

“Why are you participating like it’s a matter of course... Hareru-senpai?” I asked.

For some reason, this legal loli was suddenly sitting at our table the next thing we realized, and was clapping along to try and get us to start the meeting.

“I literally haven’t seen you around until the very second you showed up here,” I added.

“I heard Oshio was borrowing a room and doing something fun, so I decided to jump in myself!” explained Hareru-senpai.

“So you’re just a heckler, then?” I remarked.

“No! I’m not a heckler! I’m a fully-fledged friend of yours! You agree with me, Red Anal-cissist? Also known as Seisei?”

“Don’t play off Blue Exorcist’s name!” exclaimed Seisama. “That’s the show that dominated my chuunibyou phase!”

“Oh, a very sinful work indeed!” said Hareru-senpai.

“Could you all *please* stop treating Seisama like she’s some kind of natural anal character?” demanded Seisama. “If that ends up being part of her personality, there will be no turning back.”

“Then you think you can turn back from *this*?” asked Hareru-senpai and I in unison.

“Just be quiet for a moment already!” exclaimed Shion-senpai. “If you love buttocks that much, then put on your diapers and come at me!”

“What kind of way is that to blow up?!” cried the other three of us at the same time.

Shion-senpai, who had been quiet ever since the meeting began, had suddenly burst out into such character-ruining anger. I, meanwhile, immediately called Kaeru-chan.

“Hello? What’s the matter, mama? It’s not like you to call so suddenly.”

“Hello, Kaeru-chan. Shion-senpai just shouted out that we should come to her in diapers. Wanna come?”

“An invitation to a diaper party? Kaeru will be right there.”

“Stay away!” yelled Shion-senpai. “If we get any more *boke* roles in this room, we won’t be able to have the damn meeting!!!”

“Sorry,” I said to Kaeru-chan. “Could you just bring diapers and then go

home?”

“May Kaeru come wearing them?”

“Wait, but we need four.”

“Kaeru can wear them on top of one another.”

“Your lower half is going to end up looking like the Zeong,” I commented.

“You don’t have to come at all!” insisted Shion-senpai. “Kaeru-chan, just stay home and take a nap or something!”

Horsing around led to Shion-senpai ending the call for me. *She’s the one who told us to come wearing them in the first place...* I thought.

Incidentally, during all that, I also secretly sent Nekoma-senpai a chat message telling her we were having an impromptu meeting and got back only the response of “The time is now,” apropos of nothing. *Wait, what should I do?* I thought. *If she won’t stop them, should I just stay here and participate? I can never tell what that cat is thinking...*

“Anyway!” said Shion-senpai. “We’re actually starting the meeting now! I swear I’m gonna get back Seisama’s stupid monetization and solve her problem all at once!”

“Like I said, Shion-kun, you don’t need to be so angry about—”

“Hmph!”

“Well, well. It seems we’ve made you sincerely angry...”

“It’s because you’ve been keeping things from your friends. You’re just going to have to take it,” I said, trying to persuade Seisama as she kept up her uncharacteristically awkward attitude. In truth, I’d figured that if she seriously didn’t want to be here, I’d cause some kind of issue to get her out of the whole thing. But seeing her staying firmly seated, despite the troubled look on her face, made me think that that wasn’t exactly the case. Whether that was because she wanted to be rescued or because she felt guilty toward her friends was another story, though.

“I’m sorry about that,” said Seisama, “but there are things I still haven’t quite figured out myself. Even if I were to say something, I wouldn’t be confident it

was correct.”

“There you go, being roundabout again!” complained Shion-senpai. “Basically, all that will get fixed as long as we can just get your monetization back, right?!”

“I suppose that’s true, strictly speaking, but—”

“Then let’s do it!” interrupted Shion-senpai. “I, Shion-mama, will solve this dumb problem in one fell swoop! Just watch me!”

“Sheesh. You’re being more like a child than a mama right now. What a handful.”

“Not to worry, Saint!” chimed in Hareru-senpai. “We’ll be sure to bully you like crazy when the time comes for that!”

“Leave it to me,” I said. “I’ll make her into a *great* sandbag.”

“Come on, you two, lay off,” said Seisama.

Wait, I thought. *Did Hareru-senpai just call her Saint?* “Hey, Hareru-senpai, weren’t you calling her Seisei before?”

“I suddenly wanted to call her Saint, so I did!” she explained. “But it didn’t really fit in the moment, so I’ll go back to Seisei! I thought it was a good idea at the time, so I gave it a shot! That’s my Harerun Style!”

“Oh,” I said. “Same as always, then.” Hareru-senpai was famous for calling all the Live-On members by nicknames, but apparently, although she’d had this epiphany, it hadn’t seemed to quite make sense.

By the way, she’d already decided on nicknames for the fourth generation as well, though she hadn’t done so right when they’d joined. The list now looked like this: Gen 2:

Nekoma-senpai = Nekomaaa

Seisama = Seisei

Shion-senpai = Oshio

Gen 3:

Me = Awacchi or Shuwacchi

Mashiron = Maashii

Chami-chan = Chamakko

Hikari-chan = Pikarin

Gen 4:

Kaeru-chan = Froggy (since “kaeru” can also mean “frog”)

Ehrai-chan = Bosslady

Alice-chan = Aricchi (apparently Alice-chan asked for a similar nickname to mine)

“I might end up changing your Shuwacchi nickname one day, you know.” suggested Hareru-senpai.

“That would probably make me feel sad,” I replied. “You’ve been calling me that the whole time.”

“Oh, you look up to me so much you want to have a special nickname for you! Okay. I’ll keep on calling you that!”

“Yeah, sure, that works too,” I said. “By the way, why *do* you call her Seisei?”

“Because it’s an abbreviation of Saint Seiya, why?”

“Such a shocking truth. There’s basically no element of Seisama in that.”

“All right, all right, quit chatting, you two!” scolded Shion-senpai. “We’re starting the meeting now!”

Oh, she finally warned us, I thought. Guess that’s all for our off-topic discussion.

“Anyway,” she continued, “we need to get Seisama’s monetization back at any cost! But first, I need to share something we need to confirm in advance with you all.”

“Roger that,” said Hareru-senpai. “Since you were the first one to bring it up, Oshio, whatcha got?”

“Obviously I’m talking about the reason her monetization was revoked in the first place. You crossed some sort of sensitive content line, right, Seisama?”

“Yeah,” she replied. “That’s what YouTube-kun said. No idea what exactly they’re referring to, though.”

“I mean, if that part is wrong, it would be enough to make even Gandhi shout his best tsukkomi ‘whyyyyy?!’” I offered.

“YouTube-kun going through puberty sure does make it hard to deal with,” replied Seisama.

“For *you*, not them,” I finished.

“Wait, he’d be *my* tsukkomi and not YouTube-kun’s?! That’s it, you’ve *gotta* have some kind of grudge against me!”

“His tsukkomi would be on the level of Masatoshi Hamada’s at his peak,” chimed in Hareru-senpai. “Think you can take it?”

“Hareru-kun lied as easily as she breathed. And I wish she’d *stop*,” said Seisama. “Hamada was way too strong at his peak. He’d be able to knock the head off a standing, unmoving human, and then the head would gouge out the ground, go all the way around the world, and come back to its original spot on the person’s neck.”

“What an artistic tsukkomi,” I remarked. “Physically speaking, that is.”

“All right already!” said Shion-senpai. “We’re talking about YouTube right now!”

As Seisama and Shion-senpai had already mentioned, we all did our streaming on the world’s largest and most famous video-streaming platform, YouTube. As a site used by so many around the globe, it naturally maintained top-rate service, making it comfortable to stream on compared to its rival websites. But due to its immense popularity, problems tended to crop up.

The first example of that had a lot to do with Seisama’s issue: there wasn’t very good administration when it came to individual users. Any videos with mature content or ethical problems were subject to deletion and their creators subject to penalties. Unfortunately, YouTube used an AI to make these decisions. No matter how you looked at it, there was no way humans could administrate YouTube—not with its incredible scale—so the setup was reasonable. However, although it got a lot of things right, the system would sometimes pass down

obviously mistaken decisions or judgments.

To an extent, part of using the platform meant having to live with that possibility. The real problem, though, was that the AI couldn't handle explaining what part of the video was bad, or what parts had to be fixed in order for the video to be made public again. It didn't realize it was making clear mistakes, so you couldn't easily ask when the video would come back up again. It was all extremely ambiguous. As a result, one had to figure out the necessary corrections on one's own and deal with them, and everyone seemed to be on a totally different timeline when it came to how long it took for the penalty to be removed. And because the company that operated YouTube was located in the US, sometimes those who could submit support requests in English would have an advantage.

Even with all that, YouTube had become an important part of so many people's lives, and it was still a sufficiently wonderful and convenient platform that losing access to it would make a lot of people mad. You couldn't take all the positives for granted. Unfortunately, those who relied on YouTube to make a living were incredibly sensitive to the issues involved in trying to protect that living. Getting flagged and having no idea what exactly tripped the AI's systems, like Seisama, was a huge nuisance. And because this was the first time Live-On had ever needed to deal with someone having their monetization revoked, none of us were prepared to handle it.

"Then I'd like to ask you all," said Seisama. "What part of my content did YouTube-kun catch in its fetish-net?"

"...Your existence, maybe?" I offered.

"That was rather mean, Awayuki-kun."

"Awacchi?" said Hareru-senpai.

"That's right, Hareru-kun. Tell her off."

"You right."

"Hey!"

"Awayuki-chan's answer might actually be correct," Shion-senpai pointed out. "I swear. Seisama might be somewhat precocious, but YouTube-kun is just being

so stubborn about it!”

“I am indeed precocious,” Seisama agreed. “My crotch is so precocious it’s ready to physically burst. Precociously.”

“I think you’re beyond precocious, and beyond mature,” I said. “Like you’ve already grown rotten.”

“How about you switch to streaming on an adult site, Seisei?” suggested Hareru-senpai.

“You mean become an AVTuber?” asked Seisama.

“I don’t think that’s quite right either...” I said.

After that, we left the joking aside and came up with some ideas for a little while. But in the end, the only real plan we could come up with was to go back through all her past videos searching for the one thing that had tripped the system, then be even more careful than before when it came to some of her more extreme content so that it didn’t happen again.

Unfortunately, Seisama had created a *ton* of videos since she’d started streaming. And even for the more extreme content, where exactly was the line? Another question we just couldn’t answer.

Obviously, the meeting had just started, so we were about to get into the weeds. It just all seemed so inefficient to me. And my senpais all seemed to feel the same way—a kind of awkwardness settled down upon us.

And just then, I had an epiphany, though it wasn’t a direct solution. “Why not do this on a stream?” I suggested.

Their eyes all focused on me.

“Your core viewers probably know your streaming history better than you do,” I explained. “They might have some good advice for you in chat. And that would also solve the problem of you wanting the rest of us to make it into a big joke.”

“Oh, I get it,” said Hareru-senpai. “A lot of Seisei’s viewers are probably worried about her. If we make a huge joke of it on stream, we’ll be able to

soothe them, and maybe get closer to a solution at the same time. I think that's a great idea, Awacchi!"

"I *do* feel like this meeting is quickly going to get bogged down and be a waste of time," said Shion-senpai. "And that sounds more fun too... What do you think, Seisama?"

"Oh, I'd love nothing more," Seisama answered. "But are you sure? Sure that you want to stream with me, I mean?"

"...Is there a problem with that?" I asked, confused. Everyone else seemed mystified at the question too.

"Oh, but I might want to have Nekomaaa participate in my place on the day of," Hareru-senpai pointed out.

"Ah. I see..." murmured Seisama.

"I've been able to focus on my streams lately, but there's actually a pretty important project I'm working on, so it's about to get really busy for me."

"Ah, right, that's what you meant! Understood, Hareru-kun."

...I was pretty sure I'd seen clear sadness in Seisama's face when she'd heard Hareru-senpai wouldn't be participating. It was so rare for her to show her emotions like that. *She must really be nervous about the monetization thing*, I thought. *We'll have to keep the mood light and get this figured out as soon as we can.*

"Then let's all make a date for us to meet up via chat. And then we can do the stream!" Shion-senpai suggested.

With that, we broke up for the day. The next day, we confirmed Nekoma-senpai's schedule. And then, finally, we were just about to start our four-person online collab.

"I'm doing the checks now!" said Shion-senpai. "One, two... Great. No voice issues. Let's adjust our volume now..."

"Prrr, prrr."

"Hm? Was that Nekoma-senpai just now?" I asked.

“Nya?” she replied. “Yes, but why do you ask?”

We had a few minutes left until the stream, and while we each did our checks, I’d heard a sound like someone blowing raspberries. “Does that actually do anything?” I asked.

“Oh. Well, I think it’s supposed to alleviate tension around your mouth, which has a bunch of effects... It’s been a routine of mine ever since I started streaming.”

“I see. Maybe I should try it too—”

“Ahh, ahh, ahh, haah haah, ahhhh, ahhh! Ahh! Ahhhhh!”

“Hey. Yeah, you, the unemployed slut,” I said.

“What is it, Awayuki-kun?” replied Seisama.

“What are you moaning for?”

“It’s my pre-stream voice routine. I’ve been doing it for a long time.”

“That’s gotta be from when you were a sexy actress! That won’t help you at all for this kind of stream!”

“It’s just like when bodybuilders pump themselves up, y’know? When I do it, it really increases the voltage and makes me want to *do it*. Wanna *do it* with me, everyone?”

“Please don’t make this into a yuri orgy adult video,” I begged. “And you’re making my ears bleed, so please mute yourself.”

“Oh, fine. I’ll hold in my voice, I guess. But you’ll have to forgive...my *hands*.”

“Your hands?! You mean that wasn’t vocal practice?! You were *actually* touching yourself and moaning?! Is that what you mean by *voltage*?! What the hell are you doing? We’re about to start the stream!”

“I mean, it’s too late anyway, so why don’t we all play with ourselves until we almost climax and then start the stream like that? We’ll have a competition to see who can edge for the longest.”

“This isn’t some kind of planned-out adult video!!! Stop thinking it is!!!”

“As for me, I can hold out for three whole seconds.”

“You’d come as soon as we started the stream! You have zero grit! Even if we *were* doing an adult video, you’d climax while we were explaining it! The viewers would be so confused!”

“Oh, no, not at all. Common sense doesn’t apply in the world of adult videos.”

“...Really?”

“Want to try replicating it? You play the one who explains our plans to the viewers.”

“All right, fine. Here I go. Hello, and welcome, everyone! We’ve got another pervy plan coming at you to—”

“Nnnngggghhhh I’m cumming ahhhhhhhhhhh!!!!”

“Shut uuuuuuuup!!!!”

“Hmm. That didn’t work?”

“Was there *anything* good about it?”

“Hey, I heard you say ‘coming,’ so I just said the same word because I was trying to follow up. Didn’t you hear me?”

“No, no, that’s not right! You don’t just respond like that when you’re following up on someone! You’ll freeze the entire set. I don’t want to see any streaming accidents from you, got it?!”

The other three all said “huh” in unison.

“Right. Yes. In a way, my streaming accident went beyond even that. I’m very sorry.” *Wait. Why am I the one apologizing here?*

“That’s right,” agreed Seisama. “And you should be more sorry about it, Awayuki-kun.”

“Okay, I have a good idea,” I said. “Let’s change this stream into a grand plan to drain you of all your blood.”

“You’re venturing dangerously close to Washizu territory there, and it’s got me terrified... Huh. Anyway, everything I’ve said up until now has been a lie.”

“Nya,” said Nekoma-senpai. “I knew it all along, so I wasn’t even surprised!”

“I figured as much too,” I said. “You have a switch for horsing around that never turns off.”

“Ha ha ha ha!” Seisama laughed. “My apologies. Really. I thought of a funny bit after we mentioned routines, so I couldn’t help myself.”

Wait, I thought. “*After*” we mentioned routines? “You mean *before* we mentioned routines, right?” I asked.

“No, I really do moaning as a routine,” she explained. “I don’t play with myself, though, of course.”

“...You’re lying, right?” I muttered. “Tell me she’s lying, Nekoma-senpai.”

“I know this because I’m her genmate,” said Nekoma-senpai proudly. “Sei really does it every single time!”

“W-Wait! She didn’t do it during our karaoke collab!” I cried.

“I didn’t need to,” explained Seisama. “I was already drinking and talking with you and Shion-kun beforehand. It’s really just calisthenics to wake up my throat.”

“Please don’t try to sound logical by calling it *calisthenics*,” I retorted. “You almost had me convinced for a second!”

I really didn’t want to know that my senpai moans a lot before every stream, I thought. *But then again... I’m more relieved by something else.*

“Your voice sounds brighter than usual, Seisama,” I remarked.

“Hm? Does it?”

“Yes. It’s a lot clearer than when we met at the offices.”

“I don’t really know why myself,” she mused. “But I haven’t done a collab in a while. Maybe I’m excited... Right. I should rein it in a bit—”

“No, it’s totally fine,” I interrupted. “Let’s crank up the excitement even more, in fact.”

I hadn’t been able to totally predict what Seisama’s energy levels would be like before the stream, but to my relief, she seemed basically the same as before her monetization had been revoked. *Actually, she might be having even*

more fun now. *This is her first collab since losing monetization. Maybe that means something to her.*

“Heeey, Awayuki-chaaan!” called Shion-senpai. “I’m glad you two are making a short story, but could you make sure you’re all set to go? It’s almost time to stream!”

“Oh, right!” I said. “Sorry about that!” In haste, I fished out what I’d need—from the fridge. “Pshhh! Gulp gulp gulp! Phaaaahhhhh! You want a routine? Well, this is definitely mine!”

“...Nekoma-kun,” said Seisama. “Don’t you think Awayuki-kun’s routine is very similar to mine?”

“You’re both at rock bottom already,” Nekoma-senpai pointed out. “You probably shouldn’t be fighting against each other, nya.”

Awright! Sweet! Now that I’m all shuwa-shuwa’d up, let’s get this stream started: The Plan to Retake Seisama’s Monetization!

The stream began, and we got all our introductions and hellos out of the way. After that, Shion-senpai described what we’d be doing.

: Sex-samaaaa!!!

: the stream title... lol

: Retake it? when you basically handed it to them on a silver platter?

: It's a big collab! I'm just relieved you're doing well!

: LOL shuwa-chan just hanging out with the second-genners like it's nothing

Oh, right, I thought. I just realized I’m the only one here not in the second generation. “Well, I sort of got mixed up in the whole thing... I’ll do my best not to bother my senpais too much.”

“Awayuki-kun is my FWB, so she’s basically a genmate anyway,” said Seisama. “No problems here.”

“And you’re the only one without monetization out of us,” I continued.
“Please do your best not to bother the rest of us too much.”

“Wait. I thought I was supposed to be the main character of this stream. I finally gave you FWB status, and now this? I guess this is what it’s like for someone to flip from M to S.”

“At least use a normal expression like ‘biting the hand that feeds you’ or something!” exclaimed Shion-senpai.

“That was a good tsukkomi, Shion!” said Nekoma-senpai. “As expected!”

: you can really feel the friendship from how she turned that strange joke right back around on her, tee tee!

: when you said flip from M to S I thought it was like math or physics or something

: Magnetism?

: Wanna know something amazing? If you put a magnet against your body, it feels hard, sturdy, and strong.

: none of those have to do with magnetism!

: Physics (very physically)

Hmm... I thought. We’re doing this on Seisama’s stream because she asked. But chat feels a little gray and lonely without all those colorful supers I’m so used to seeing. It really hammered the reality home—it was gone for her.

Despite it all, I still adored my senpai, and I wanted to get her back on her feet as soon as possible. On this stream, we had to make it all into a joke in order to alleviate her chat’s worries, then discuss with them possible ways to get her monetization back. *It might be tough, but together, I know we can do it!*

“Anyway, that’s enough of a hook,” said Seisama. “Let’s get down to business. Chat, why do you all think my monetization stopped?”

“Because of literally everything you say and do?” I offered.

“I think it’s because of how you look!” said Nekoma-senpai.

: The name Sex-sama?

: your voice is just too sexy

: PENIS

: All of the above?

: There's way too many things to point out just going through your archives. It'd take a lifetime to point them all out

: Because you exist?

“Hey, quit saying random stuff that doesn’t apply here,” chided Seisama. “And the only one of you who’s right is the one who said penis.”

“That’s the only *wrong* one, stupid!” Shion-senpai exclaimed. “What do we even do? There’s too many things to fix! We have no idea what to do!”

“If this were a test, we’d get miserable grades,” I remarked. “I’m talking Nobita-kun levels bad.”

“My crotch region is always testing itself,” Sei-senpai assured me. “All over the place, in fact.”

“When I think of your crotch going all Geddan it’s hysterical!” said Nekoma-senpai.

“Why are we even assuming Seisama has something attached down there?” asked Shion-senpai. “And yet then she turns around and starts talking like she doesn’t have one. I just don’t understand anything anymore...”

“It’s whatever works best in the situation,” explained Seisama. “Naturally, I am a girl, through and through.”

: brb, gotta make a geddan video

: LMA000 i have several ideas why monetization would get

revoked JUST from this conversation

: Seisama is...a girl too, you know...

: huh?

: ??????

“Anyway, we’re not getting anywhere. We can’t waste time here!” chided Shion-senpai. “I’d like to thoroughly help with all Seisama’s problems right here, one by one! And if you guys in chat have any ideas, keep them coming!”

“You can leave this to me,” said Seisama. “I have a *very* wide range when it comes to role-play. Plenty of add-ons and bonuses to go for too. I’m ever-changing. Phantasmagoric, if you will.”

“This will never work,” commented Nekoma-senpai.

“Now, now, Nekoma-senpai,” I said. “If there’s a challenge, you have to give it a shot before anything happens. Let’s do all we can.”

Now that we’d shared our objective with the viewers, Shion-senpai could finally put things into motion. “First off!” she declared. “If we want this stream to end on a good note, Seisama will be using a safety mechanism we prepared for her! Using it will make this stream safe, at least!”

“Oh?” said Seisama. “And what sort of thing is it, Shion-kun?”

“It’s actually several different tools, all for the purpose of shutting out any possible sensitive content points about you, Seisama!” Shion-senpai paused. “It turned into something a little forceful, though.”

“Huh?”

“Well, let’s not sweat the small stuff and just try it out! Seisama will be going away for a moment while she gets changed.”

“Oh, I can tell this won’t be anything good,” said Seisama. “But I’m the one at fault, so I can’t refuse. In fact, the idea of her doing something to me is getting me very excited. Throbbing excited, in fact.”

Twitching, Seisama was dragged off-screen. And then, about a minute later...

“All finished! Come on out, Seisama!”

“Oh. Right. Yeah, I’ll come if I can.”

“That’s what people say when they’re definitely not coming!”

“No, I’ll go. I’ll go! Ahh, I’m gonna come. I’m definitely gonna come! Ahh, I’m coming, I’m coming...”

“Where on earth *are* you going...? Quit fooling around and get out here!”

“Okay, okay... But are you sure? Are you *sure* it’s okay for me to be in public like this?”

“Yep! It’ll make the stream 100% safe, guaranteed!”

“Oh... Well, okay then. I’ll be right there.”

“Feast your eyes on this! The ultimate result of our combined wisdom!”

At Shion-senpai’s call, Seisama’s avatar came back onto the screen, but...

“Hey, ladies and gents! It’s your girl, Seisama!”



And as for what she looked like...

: what???

: THE FULL BODY PIXELATION LMAOOO

: XDDDDDD

: It's her! (With some restrictions)

: We finally got an all-ages version of Sei-sama

As the comments described, not a single part of her below her face was clearly visible. It was a pretty extreme measure.

“That looks really good on you, Sei-sama,” I complimented.

“Really?” she replied. “Do you *really* think so? Aren’t I supposed to be the stream’s protagonist? You’re treating me like someone you’re not allowed to show.”

“No, no! I’ve legit never seen someone look so good in full-body pixelation!”

“Yeah, but I’m pretty sure nobody’s *supposed* to. Pixelation is for hiding things! I can tell you’re not complimenting me, you know. I’ve seen—and been involved with—all kinds of adult videos, but this is the first time I’ve ever seen full-body pixelization.”

“A VTuber whose whole body is a reproductive organ has finally been born!” I pointed out.

“She hasn’t even been born!” insisted Sei-sama. “Because she’s completely hidden.”

“Oh, crap!” said Shion-senpai suddenly. “Sei-sama, you forgot to put this on! Here!”

“Huh? Oh. Right. Okay, Shion-kun... Wait, this... Where do I put it?”

“Over your eyes, of course!”

“Gotcha... Like this?”

“Yes, yes! Now you’re even *safer* for work!”

Shion-senpai had taken out a horizontal black line, just big enough to hide Sei-sama’s eyes. You know, one of those black bars they use to protect people’s identities.

“Whoa!” exclaimed Nekoma-senpai. “Covering your eyes like that makes you look like a highly mysterious chuunibyou character! Very cool!”

“Are your eyes knotholes, Nekoma-kun? The only kind of characters with full-body mosaics and black bars over their eyes are gag characters. I mean, think about what a character who looks good in this getup would even be named. They wouldn’t be named Sei Utsuki, that’s for sure. They’d be Ikuiku Binbin-maru or something, I’m sure of it,” explained Sei-sama, using a pair of words that could potentially be taken as safe for work but almost definitely weren’t meant to be.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Ikuiku Binbin-maru!” replied Nekoma-senpai.

“Oh, great. Now she likes it. I shouldn’t have said anything. Shion Kaminari, Awayuki Kokorone, Nekoma Hirune, and Ikuiku Binbin-maru. Talk about a strange lineup. We’re gonna be sued for impurities in the water!”

“But at least now we fixed the problem with your appearance!” pointed out Nekoma-senpai. “YouTube won’t be able to say anything with you looking like this!”

“Yeah, because if I got banned like this, it would cast massive doubt on YouTube-kun’s fetishes. I’m actually terrified; I never even thought of putting pressure on him like this. Actually, now I want to test what I’d have to do to get banned in this form. Since if I managed to get banned, I’d become an immortal legend.”

“Hey, Ikubin-maru! We were going for all the jokes at first, but we’re really trying to figure out a good plan here! I won’t allow you to do such a thing!” Nekoma-senpai said.

“Oh, no. They’ve already abbreviated it. It’s over. Also, *you’re* the one joking around right now...”

“Now, now. We actually considered using a voice changer to get you into that super-low voice, but I held myself back. I’d appreciate some thanks, Ikuiku Chinchin-maru,” I said, swapping in the word for “penis.”

“That’s Ikuiku Binbin-maru to you,” shot back Sei-sama. “Don’t get it wrong again, Awayuki-kun... Wait, no. It’s Sei Utsuki.”

“Well, it seems like you kinda like it!” I replied.

“No. No, I don’t. It’s just that it rolls off the tongue so well that my mouth naturally just wanted to suck on some Ikuiku Binbin-maru.”

“Why did you make it sound lewd?”

“Heh heh. Did my lewd wording turn you on?”

“Are you sure you should be saying that, considering how you look?”

“How I *look* is all your fault!”

: The artificial turf is talking

: I am laughing so hard at even Sei-sama getting into the idea

: She doesn't usually end up being the straight man though huh

: It's because everyone is mercilessly teasing her haha

: This resolution is the lowest in the world, she's definitely Ikuiku Binbin-maru

: I'm loving these visuals. It's like if they tried to force an all-ages version of a super erotic game and there being nothing left

“Ladies, I understand this is all to prevent anything about my appearance causing an issue. But isn’t this going a little overboard?”

“We didn’t have enough time yesterday to prepare anything else!” complained Shion-senpai. “Don’t blame us!”

“I understand that, but...”

“Hey, just hold on a second, Shion-senpai,” I said. “I, Shuwa-chan, have the perfect thing for this!”

“Oh! What is it?”

“Check this out!”

I displayed a large image of StroZero on the screen. And then I dragged it over to just below Sei-sama’s neck to cover everything below the face, though she’d removed the pixelization and the black bar.

“What do you think, Sei-sama?” I asked. “This was one of the proposals for a new outfit from when I did that off-collab with Mashiron. It should fully hide your many, many elements.”

“Leaving aside why it’s StroZero, I see you hid it with an image. I guess it’s not bad, but...”

“Mgh. That’s pretty noncommittal,” I said. “You can very clearly see everything above the neck, can’t you?”

“I mean, yeah, but...”

“Now I’m angry. I’m putting the pixelation back.”

“Wait, I get it, please, stop!”

“Onto the StroZero.”

“Onto the StroZero?! I mean, maybe it *is* best to pixelate it, but I’m pretty sure it’s too late considering what you’ve already done!”

Sei-sama was reluctant, but understood it had to be done. *I totally get her reluctance, though. Her body is important to her—her illustrator, her mama, drew it for her.*

But the fact was that, character design-wise, Sei-sama’s clothing had a lot of erotic elements. It was probably best to do *something* about that, just to stay safe for the time being. If YouTube suddenly tightened up their standards and her current outfits were crossing the line, it would affect basically her entire stream archive. That was the one thing I really wanted to make sure didn’t

happen. "I really hope your outfits are going to be all right..." I muttered.

: So much that

: hmm. i mean, there have been more...stimulating vtubers than sei-sama that get monetized just fine

: I have a feeling her current outfit is just barely safe

: I don't have a perfect grasp of the situation, but her normal outfit is probably fine

: Certain thumbnails in the past might be a little more concerning though

My comment led to the chat giving several opinions. *Oh, right*, I thought. *We were supposed to be getting opinions from the viewers who are smarter about this stuff, right? We should get them to keep 'em coming.*

There're so many people supporting us right now. Gives me that fuzzy feeling inside...

"Thanks for your suggestions, everyone. If you think of anything at all, be sure to tell us!" Then Shion-senpai paused. "Actually, when I think calmly about it... Sei-sama, you're usually a machine gun of dirty jokes. Are those okay? Though I'll admit I've gotten pulled along into them before too."

"Sorry," replied Sei-sama. "I only did it because this stream is already demonetized."

"No need to be so defiant with me... Saying stuff like that is going to mean everything we've tried to do, and anything we try to do from here on, will all go to waste..."

Now that the visuals were fixed, it was time to deal with her words and actions. "Sei-sama," I said, "the stuff you say and do *could* stray into sensitive content sometimes. So I wonder if your dirty jokes are, well..."

"Awayuki-kun, without dirty jokes, who am I? Just a Dutch wife, that's who!"

"I wish you'd feel weirder about calling yourself both a dirty joker and a Dutch

wife.”

“What?! Coming from the one who’s both a dirty joker and a StroZero!”

“As long as the StroZero is in there, I don’t care what you say.”

“Awayuki-kun, I’m starting to think maybe we should consider *your* future, not mine.”

We couldn’t knock it until we tried it. It was time to get her away from that part of her sensitive content—by force, if need be. “Sei-sama, from this moment on, you’re not allowed to make any dirty jokes. All right?”

“What?!” she cried. “Are you telling me to die?! Forbidding dirty jokes? If you do that, I’m going to lick you on the tongue and then just chomp down!”

“You’d end up biting your own tongue, I think. Stop trying to slip in double entendres like that involving ‘doing’ me... You don’t seem sorry at all, do you? Well, I won’t brook any complaints! From now on, no more dirty jokes!”

“...Really?”

“Really.”

.....

“Uuuuu... Sniff...”

She’s... She’s crying?!?!

“Oh, there there, Sei-sama,” Shion-senpai said soothingly. “What happened? You can tell me.”

“I lost my reason for living...”

“You’re staking too much of your life on dirty jokes!” I exclaimed. “The world is filled with so many things more wonderful than that! Like lemon-flavored StroZero and grapefruit-flavored StroZero and grape-flavored StroZero!”

“That’s right, Sei-sama,” added Shion-senpai. “You have a very important role to fill—you must become my baby. What are you fooling around for? I won’t let you die until I’ve raised you as much as I possibly can.”

“You should come on a journey with me to dig up all of the E.T. cartridges buried throughout the world! They only dug up 1178 of them in New Mexico, if

I recall. For a mass-produced kusoge, that is far too little. I've got my eyes set on other places they're buried too!"

"Waaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!! These people are terrifying!!!!!"

: They should all be secured and preserved as human mutations, right now!

: Agreed. Including Sei-sama, of course.

: Who'd have thought Live-On was a research facility for getting humans to evolve?

: Like Umbrella?

: Well, first-time viewers, Harerun is actually the mastermind.

"Oh, no, look at how much she's crying. No bullying Sei-sama, Shuwa-chan!" Shion-senpai scolded.

"Um, I feel like that wasn't really my fault—"

"Nya-nya! You did it! You did it! I'm telling on you to the boss!"

"Well, if I wasn't dead before, I am now. I should write that last will and testament while I can. *I lived a life without regrets. Especially when I tried opening that StroZero with my left ring finger that one time. Good times. My finger caught on the can's opening, and when I gently pulled, it got stuck on my precious ring finger. And that was the wedding ring I got from StroZero. The wedding bells rang to bless us, making the greatest 'pshhh!' sound I've ever heard, and that's how we were married.* That should do it."

"Mama, mama, what's that lady talking about?" said Sei-sama.

"Oh, my little Sei-sama. That's a baby in her StroZero phase. We should leave her alone, okay?"

"Yo, baby girl, what was with those tears?" I pointed out.

"I was faking it. Also, I'll apologize, so *please* don't call me baby girl."

: I'm pretty sure I'm not a first-time viewer, but I have no idea what's going on, so I'm probably a first-time viewer.

: Hey, no playing the "I'll call the Boss" card

: so she finally got married to StroZero LMAO

: I feel so bad for testament-kun for having that written in there

: OMG a baby in her strozero phase please i can't. lmaooo

"Hear me out, Awayuki-kun," said Sei-sama. "To be honest, I'm pretty sure my dirty jokes don't actually have much of an effect on anything."

"Why's that?" I asked, surprised.

"Because you'd have been banned already."

"Oh... Yeah, that makes sense." I paused. "But your jokes are more erotic."

"I think they're basically the same!" chimed in Nekoma-senpai.

"Yep!" agreed Shion-senpai. "You're both super problem children, together!"

Are you kidding me? I thought. *They're putting me on the same level as Sei-sama? But that means I'm literally just sensitive-content-flavored StroZero...*

"Anyway, yeah," Sei-sama went on. "I think the problem lies elsewhere."

"I see. You do have a point. Any other ideas, then?" I asked, finally pushing this big conference to actually look for the real problem...

"Oh. *This* is definitely crossing the line," I said.

"Another candidate for deletion, huh?" agreed Shion-senpai.

"Another name for your Death Note, Shion," said Nekoma-senpai.

"You're all acting like you're discussing something totally awful," said Sei-sama. "We're just listing all the videos that might be too much, you know."

With our initial gallivanting calmed down, we'd been selecting videos from her archive that we thought crossed the line, with the chat's help as well. Sei-sama's serious fans could actually give opinions on some streams that were pretty far back. Plus, we had the perspectives of people in chat who knew more about YouTube's AI; they helped identify problematic parts of those videos. We were listing everything in two columns: videos to definitely delete, and candidates for deletion.

The more opinions we got, the more I came to realize our limits. These viewers watched every day, and they were really helping us out. The best strategy now would be to whittle down the list of deletions so that we could finally ask for specific reevaluations, but...

"I've gotta say, this is some really detailed work," remarked Sei-sama. "My eyes are starting to hurt."

"Now, now. We're going pretty quickly thanks to all the viewers, so let's keep trying for a little longer, Sei-sama," I encouraged her.

"There're so many LOLs in the chat because of all the insane things Sei has said in the past!" noted Nekoma-senpai.

"Aha ha..." laughed Shion-senpai. "Well, I'm glad you're all having fun! It was worth suggesting all this!"

"Don't worry," said Sei-sama. "I won't break—not when I'm the one who started all this. I just wish YouTube-kun would be a little more specific about which sections are no good."

In all honesty, I couldn't deny feeling a bit tired myself. But it really felt like we were getting somewhere. *I might be pretty let down if we get through the entire stream and still don't have a solution, but still...*

"At this point, should we all just invade the replies on YouTube's official Cheeper account?" asked Sei-sama.

"Talk about twisting someone's arm right off..." I muttered.

"They won't even spare you a glance!" insisted Nekoma.

"If this was the AI making a real mistake, that would be one thing," said Shion-

senpai. “But you’re a different story altogether. Besides, none of us can speak English.”

“Come on, we can just use translation software!” insisted Sei-sama. “And there might be people in chat who can speak it!”

“Even if there were, what would we send them?” I asked.

“An apology, I guess. Let’s send them a nice little *sumanko*,” she suggested, combining *sumimasen* for “sorry” and *manko* for “pussy.”

“Are you trying to get yourself banned on Cheeper too? Also, that’s not even English.”

“<Sorry pussy,>” she said in English.

“<Shut up!>” I retorted.

: Considering everything that's happened so far I'm astonished how generous and patient YoTube-kun has been with you crazies

: c'mon! anyone with study abroad experience in the chat?

: Hello I graduated from Harvard's dirty joke program

: How about doing an ACTUAL year

: Japanese is really the best. Where else can you so naturally mix an apology with a female reproductive organ?

We kept on working even as we shot the breeze. With chat’s help, we continued going through Sei-sama’s stream archives.

“Here’s one that’s no good. *Chupa Chups Chupa-Chupa ASMR*.”

“Wait, really? AVSM isn’t allowed either?” Sei-sama asked.

“You mean *ASMR*,” I insisted. “Wet noises toe the line, so let’s treat it as no good.”

“Why did you even want to do this?” asked Nekoma-senpai.

“I thought maybe it was a chance to get a sponsorship,” she explained.

“But then you ruined it on purpose?” asked Shion-senpai.

“Eh, fine. Next time I’ll shill PornRub.”

“Can’t you at least go with DLsite? Also, are you even *allowed* to shill them?” I asked.

“With my connections, anything is possible.”

“If anyone could, it would be you, which has me at a loss...” I muttered.

“Anyway, getting back on topic, most of your ASMR stuff is probably no good. It’s all too stimulating, and the thumbnails are all risqué. Good thing there aren’t that many of them.”

We continued after that, talking among ourselves until night came. Finally, we reached a breaking point and decided to wrap things up for the day. We couldn’t exactly say we’d solved everything, but Shion-senpai was liable to try and do everything on her own, so I’d be happy if Sei-sama’s monetization came back. And even if it didn’t, we’d just think of new ways to handle it. Persistence was key!

“Anyway, that about does it for this stream,” said Sei-sama. “But I’d like to express my thanks to you all first. I’m really moved by how many people are here trying to help me. To tell you the truth... There’s been a lot on my mind, and I’ve been a bit down in the dumps. While matters aren’t exactly solved yet, I think I smiled more today than I have in a while. And it’s all thanks to you. So, thank you.”

Hearing Sei-sama go out of her way to thank everyone so honestly warmed my heart and made me want to smile. *She’s a cheeky one*, I thought.

But everyone else seemed to feel the same way. We all gave her some words of encouragement and promises of support to mark the stream’s end.

“Heh heh!” sniffed Shion-senpai. “I’m everyone’s mama, which means I can more than handle problems like these! Once things are settled, I’m gonna wring the rest of the story out of you, so you’d better prepare yourself!”

“I can smell the same kind of weird scent from you as I do from kusoge and kuso movies! Which means you have my full cooperation!”

“Now that I’m involved with all this, I’ll stick with you. Let’s do everything we possibly can. Don’t worry—your monetization will come back,” I promised.

: I'm prepared to give a max super, so get it fixed soon please~!

: We'll be waiting!

: I'll send everything I would have sent already, so don't worry. It'll basically be the same

: Yes, that

: ahhh the warm cozy feelings

The stream window, while an inorganic object, now felt, for some reason, incredibly warm.

It was possible that getting her monetization back would take a lot of time, or there would be some kind of major problem in our way. But Live-On shared a bond, and Sei-sama was a part of that. Nothing would change.

So everything's fine. There's no need to worry. Time to rally myself and steadily make a joke out of it!

.....At least, I'd *thought* we'd all joined hands, but...

Not a week later...

“My monetization is back! We did it, everyone!”

“Huh?” we all said.

.....Huh?

In contrast with Sei-sama’s sprightly voice, the other three of us—Shion-senpai, Nekoma-senpai, and I (Awa)—let out a grunt to show our very sincere lack of understanding.

The four of us had all come to the office after being told that there had been some movement on our plan to get Sei-sama's monetization back. But the moment she'd seen everyone had gotten here and sat down, Sei-sama had suddenly come out with *that*.

"Hm? What's the matter, ladies?" she asked. "My monetization is finally back. You can be a little happier, you know."

All three of our brains were still on loading screens, and our faces showed it.

Okay, sure, I get what she's saying, of course. Her revoked monetization has been reinstated, and she's happy about that. We all came here after being told there had been movement, but then we got a surprise announcement that the problem was solved? Is that what's happening?

It's just... Well...

Nekoma-senpai was the first to recover, and said the thing that was on everyone's minds. "That was quick."

Is this like beating the demo of a game only to find that we actually cleared the whole thing? Is that what's happening to us...? "I-Is it really back?" I asked.

"Yup. It'll take a bit longer for it to be applied, though," she explained. "I got a message from the management saying I could apply for monetization again and that their investigation turned up no problems."

"I see..." I replied. *Mm-hmm. It really is swell. I'm supposed to be happy right now, I think. It's just... It feels like they totally sidestepped us, so my body just won't let me be happy... The problem's solved now, right? That's enough, isn't it?*

"...H-How?" stammered Shion-senpai, the slowest of us to recover, sounding dazed. "D-Did you delete all your past videos or something?"

"No, no, no," replied Sei-sama. "I deleted some, but most are still there. That would have been a last resort if we really couldn't do anything else about it."

"But it's still so soon..."

"Umm," said Sei-sama. "Apparently, Hareru-kun has been doing a *lot* of work behind the scenes."

“Hareru-senpai?!” we all exclaimed, shocked.

Sei-sama went on to explain it to us.

While we’d been on stream, picking out all the videos that probably crossed the line, Hareru-senpai had been spreading her own tendrils, even overseas, using her English skills. While she couldn’t get it down one hundred percent perfectly, she’d done a bunch of research on how YouTube’s screening worked, striving to get Sei-sama her monetization back.

She’d mentioned before that she had an important job. *So this is what she meant...*

Hareru-senpai had reported to Sei-sama, saying, “Something similar to this might happen in the future, so it was a good excuse to really nail down their standards!” with such a cool, collected face, like all she was saying was that she’d just bought lunch from the convenience store. *Hareru-senpai... Truly a force to be reckoned with!*

More surprising, though, was the assistance of quite a few overseas fans of Live-On, several of whom had already sent in support requests to YouTube. Apparently, that might have been part of what had sped up the platform’s response.

Hareru-senpai had been proud of it. “This is what all our hard work has done for us,” she’d said to Sei-sama. “We’ve been trying our best to show all our viewers a good time. That’s why there are people out there willing to act on our behalf when we’re in trouble.”

Essentially, it had gone like this: they’d checked the screening methods Hareru-senpai had researched against the dangerous-seeming videos we’d marked on our stream, and with the added knowledge overseas fans had regarding YouTube, they’d been able to very quickly bring the situation to a point where monetization seemed recoverable. The content that had probably tripped the alerts was her thumbnails and ASMR; they’d apparently overlooked her outfit and crazy remarks.

“I’ve gotta say, I’m so glad the worst of it is out of the way,” said Sei-sama. “It’ll be business as usual with my streams again. And I really do have all of you to thank for it.” She bowed deeply to all of us.

Seeing her really drove the point home—the problem had been solved. But just as I was starting to feel happy about it, I noticed Shion-senpai was acting weird for some reason.

Her face was red as an apple. *What could be wrong?* I wondered.

“Then,” she said, pausing. “Was there any point to my project...?”

...*Oh*, I thought. She was right. Judging by what we’d just heard, Hareru-senpai had pulled a *Death Note* Gevanni move and done everything in a single night. *Now I’m feeling like we could have just left it all to Hareru-senpai and her temporary return to the administration team, and the result would have been the same.*

“No,” said Sei-sama. “You know that list of deletion candidates we all made? It was super helpful to match that up with the screening standards. Without it, they wouldn’t have been able to reinstate my monetization so quickly.”

“But still!” complained Shion-senpai. “They could have done it if they’d needed to. If we got to the solution so quickly, then we didn’t need to do anything. The management would have sprung into action on their own!”

The more she said, the less our efforts seemed to mean. Her face went beyond red; she started to tear up.

To be frank, this project had all started when Shion-senpai had let her annoyance at Sei-sama’s attitude get to her head. The passion was all well and good, but now that the problem had been solved, it had nowhere to go. It had naturally dissipated, leaving only calm behind, and in that calmness, she’d realized we hadn’t actually achieved anything.

In other words, Shion-senpai was shaking from two emotions right now: the shame at having gotten too enthusiastic about this and the regret at not having been able to solve things ourselves.

“Maybe I... Maybe I shouldn’t have done any of that...” murmured Shion-senpai, hanging her head under the weight of the tears she seemed ready to shed at any moment.

For a moment, I wondered what to say to her.

“That’s not true! At least, not for me.”

But it turned out I didn’t have to.

Sei-sama’s declaration left no room for argument, and Shion-senpai looked up at her in surprise. The former’s eyes stared right into the latter’s, looking brisk and refreshed—like she’d made up her mind about something.

“Aha ha... This might not be very like me, but... I was worried. You know, when I lost my monetization,” explained Sei-sama, sounding a little embarrassed.

By the look of things, this was the reason behind her change when her monetization had stopped—the reason she’d always deflected questions regarding it, which she had never told us about.

“I said this before, but at first, I really didn’t think much of it. It was just one of those *oh, it finally happened* kind of things. But when I started to think about it a little more, I realized something...”

And now she was revealing the reason behind it all. Everyone present waited quietly for her next words.

“I realized that at this rate, I might also affect the other Livers’ monetization, like through our collabs together or something... And then even I couldn’t make light of it anymore.”

I see... I thought. Everyone in Live-On worked in one big group. Our activities went beyond our individual channels. Was that why she hadn’t shown up in anyone else’s streams since her monetization had been revoked? *Still, though, I thought, we were so desperately trying to solve Sei-sama’s unseen problem that we never considered we were the cause of it...*

“Heh heh. Awayuki-kun, you just thought to yourself, *She was worried about us? Hey, she’s actually kind of cute sometimes, didn’t you?*”

“Geh. How did you know that?”

“Written all over your face. Unfortunately, seems like I’m not *that* good a person.”

“Huh?”

“Ultimately, I was just being childish.” There was a bit of regret in her expression as she laughed ruefully at herself. “I tried to get rid of it, but it never went away, deep down... That fear of being alone. That maybe all the other Livers would start avoiding collabs with me and I’d be isolated. And that to avoid it, I’d have to change myself, but then my fans might not accept that. I had to be Sei Utsuki, to keep her character fully intact... It was all making a real mess in my brain, let me tell you. In the end, I couldn’t figure out what was the right answer anymore.”

...I was surprised. Sei-sama was mold-breaking enough to be considered arrogant, but her feelings were probably much more delicate than mine were.

Being able to imagine any possibility and accept it was very respectable, but that ability was by its very nature transient, quick to fall apart. I’d imagined huge castle walls in Sei-sama’s heart, but they’d actually been made of sand.

Her expression was twisted in self-deprecation, her emotions getting the better of her. She was always so gallant; I wouldn’t have been able to imagine her like this otherwise.

But when I saw it—maybe this wasn’t the right thing to think, but I felt a very human warmth from her. My relationship with her had been one of bad, enabling friends. But that was always the Sei-sama we were imagining. She had worries and struggles sometimes, just like the rest of us. Learning that made me feel almost satisfied, in a way—Sei-sama made more sense to me now.

...Come to think of it, Shion-senpai had once told me what Sei-sama was like right after the second generation’s debut. I remembered her words and actions being a little hard to understand, but didn’t *everyone* get flustered right after their debut?

Right now, Sei-sama felt *real* to me.

“Yeah, so that’s what was on my mind...” said Sei-sama. “Ha ha ha. You’re all too nice to me. You didn’t avoid me at all. You just got even more outgoing toward me. Some of you would message me worried, and others treated it all like a funny joke too. The next thing I knew, I had so many messages I couldn’t respond to them all.”

As she spoke, her expression grew brighter and brighter.

“In the end, things kinda got resolved easier than any of us thought. It’s basically all back to normal now, no problems... But you all really *did* save me. So, seriously, thank you.”

She smiled then, seeming just a little bit bashful.

That was satisfying. A nice, heartwarming resolution! *Maybe I’ll suggest we have a celebratory collab for when her monetization officially returns!* I thought, my mood bright and clear.

“...that.....”

“Shion-kun?”

But one of my senpais did not seem happy.

“...! What’s that supposed to mean?! Don’t dodge the issue here!!!”

“Whoa!” Nekoma-senpai and I said out of reflex. Shion-senpai was *actually* pissed (for the second time since this all began).

“The more I hear about your worries, the stupider they sound! I, at least, was coming at this whole thing fully prepared for my *own* monetization to get revoked—no, for my *channel* to get banned, but as long as we solved the problem in the end and could laugh together again, I was fine with that! I wasn’t solely responsible for building up my own channel, and neither were you! We *all* helped each other! You remember what it was like right after the second generation debuted! Everything was so unstable, up in the air, and we were all frantic! But we got through it by working together, remember?! I’ve never, ever thought your channel didn’t matter to me because it wasn’t mine! It’s something we all worked so hard to build! I was willing to do everything I possibly could, no matter how hard it was, to get to that happy ending!!! And yet... You were thinking something totally different? If you were that worried about everything, why didn’t you rely on us more? Were you *trying* to treat us like total strangers? And it wasn’t just me—*everyone* at Live-On was worried sick about you! And yet... This is so incredibly, unbelievably, ridiculously *rude* of you!!!”

As Shion-senpai’s continuous eruption of emotions poured out of her, you could see her face change—it stayed red, but now it was the red of rage, not

embarrassment.

“No, wait a minute, Shion-kun,” insisted Sei-sama. “There’s a good reason for —”

“Shut up!” cried Shion-senpai. “You’re heartless and insensitive and I don’t care about you anymore!!!!”

Despite Sei-sama’s hasty attempt at defending herself, the exploding Shion-senpai cut her off, then flung open the door and ran out of the room.

Hmmm... I thought. Maybe she got a little too emotional, but when I think about it, I can empathize with how she’s feeling. A lot of it had to do with how invested she’d been in this whole matter.

Sei-sama looked like she was at a loss for what to do; it was all so sudden. So I asked, “Aren’t you going after her?”

“Awayuki-kun...”

“She was willing to save you even if it hurt her. She just wanted to see you smile again. And you still have something to say to her, don’t you?”

“...Yeah. Thanks!” she said, her expression sharpening. She then burst out of the room in pursuit of Shion-senpai.

That expression was very similar to the kind she always wore—but this time, it looked way cooler.

“Phew...” I breathed.

“Nya ha ha ha!” laughed Nekoma-senpai. “Well, good work. As a reward, I’ll give you a massage!”

We hadn’t been here for very long at all, but it felt like so much had happened. Once the two of them were gone, I felt a strange feeling wash over me—liberation, accomplishment maybe. When Nekoma-senpai saw me exhale, she started rubbing my shoulders.

“Mm... I feel like I’m not supposed to let a senpai do this stuff for me...” I commented. “It does feel nice, though.”

“It’s fine, no worries! You worked really hard, even though you only got mixed

up in this by coincidence.”

“Isn’t it the same for you, though?”

“Well, I’m her genmate and her friend. At first, I was waiting to see how she’d handle it, but I always intended to step in at some point.”

“In that case, I’m her kouhai and her friend, and I couldn’t just sit by and watch. That’s all.”

“Nya-nya?! How are you such a good girl?! I don’t understand! Come, come, come, I’m gonna massage you until you’re loose as jelly!!!”

“W-Wait, Nekoma-senpai! You’re being too rough! You’re gonna dislocate my shoulders!”

And so time passed as I horsed around with Nekoma-senpai, ever the mischief-lover.

“Sei does seem like she’s finally gotten a little more honest with herself, though,” remarked Nekoma-senpai.

“Huh? The way you said that... You realized all this about her before?”

“Well, we’ve been together since our debut, you know? I don’t know all the details, but I always knew she was actually kinda delicate. That’s why I’ve only ever called her Sei, not Sei-sama.”

“Ohhh. So that’s why you drop the -sama even though Shion-senpai keeps it.”

“In my opinion, Shion is the *dense* one here. Like she doesn’t know how honest Sei is being. I guess that’s one of her good points, though.”

I could tell from her words that Nekoma-senpai thought a lot about those two. Apparently that stuff she’d told me after the kusoge stream hadn’t been a lie.

And now I could understand her telling me that we weren’t the main characters this time. This story had to remain all about Sei-sama and Shion-senpai, not us.

In any case, it struck me that while Sei-sama and Nekoma-senpai both came across as happy-go-lucky—albeit each in her own way—Nekoma-senpai seemed

much, much cleverer. The fact that she was able to take a step back and watch over the two rabble-rousers made her seem more mature. Maybe she'd always been the one in a guardianship position, not Shion-senpai.

Well, anyway, to sum up my thoughts about this incident...

“Sei-sama is such a handful, isn't she?”

“You've got that right!”

As we reflected on everything that brought us here, Nekoma-senpai and I laughed with each other for a little while.

I didn't know what Sei-sama and Shion-senpai talked about after all that, but we were certain it was something very meaningful.

It's the last act, Sei-sama. You'd better show her your cool side!

Chapter 3

Starting Sound (Shion)

Sei Utsuki burst out of the room in frantic pursuit of Shion Kaminari, but the Live-On offices weren't big enough to play tag in. When Sei caught up to her, Shion was on a landing in the emergency stairwell, balled up in a corner, head down.

Thankfully, nobody else was around. Shion realized Sei was behind her, but made no move to turn to look. Still, she didn't try to run away again either.

Sei hesitated for a moment, not knowing what to say to her. But she made up her mind, believing that if she were to leave now, it would be by far the biggest display of rudeness toward everyone who had helped her.

"Umm..." she said. "I'm sorry. I'm not really sure what to say, but... For now, just, I'm sorry."

"...I don't understand."

I don't understand. That was how Shion had managed to put the complicated feelings in her heart into words.

"I..." she stammered. "I really thought of you as someone precious. And Nekoma. Both of my genmates are good friends. Special people that I've gotten through a lot of difficulties in life with. I thought of you both like soldiers who go through a war together would think of each other. But... It doesn't seem like you did, Sei-sama."

"Shion-kun..."

"Was it just me? Sei-sama, I really, really..." Shion paused, then gave a little laugh. "But I guess I was just being conceited and misunderstood. Do you really only think of me as someone from work?"

"No! No, I don't!"

“Yes, you do!!! And if you don’t, why didn’t you ever say anything?!” She choked up again. “Sorry for yelling at you. I must be such a bother to you right now. I’m really, really sorry. I got my own hopes up, and I got hurt...”

“Calm down, Shion-kun. You’re wrong! That’s not how it is!”

“Look, it’s... It’s fine now. I know someday we’ll be able to look back on today and laugh. Wounds heal. So I’ll be fine. I’m fine, okay?”

“Please, listen to what I’m saying for one—huh?”

Unable to stand how miserable Shion’s back looked, Sei pulled her so they were face-to-face, meaning to somehow get her to listen. And she tried—but then her words left her.

Shion had on the same calm smile as she always did. Her cheeks, though, were streaked with tears.

Seeing that hurt Sei so, so much. And at last, she understood just how deeply her actions had hurt Shion.

“It’s all so weird...” stammered Shion. “I’m so dumb... And selfish. I know from experience that sadness like this won’t last forever, but...”

Wounds did heal. But if they were too big, they’d never heal *perfectly*.

“Why am I crying over something like this?” she continued. “Why is it so painful? I know I must look so funny, the woman who misunderstood everything—so why won’t the tears stop? Ha ha, I guess even my tear ducts are being dumb now...”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry!”

Sei’s body moved before she could think. She embraced Shion—held her tight.

But the tears continued to flow, on and on, even faster this time. And each one of those falling droplets was composed of Shion’s feelings for Sei...

Sei continued to hold her until her tears finally stopped. To the two of them, it had felt like such a long time, yet also the briefest of moments.

“Sorry. I’m okay now.”

“Yeah.”

“...Umm... I’m okay now.”

“Yeah.”

“No, like, this isn’t a ‘yeah’ situation, Sei-sama. Umm, I’m fine, so I was thinking maybe you could let go now.”

“Yeah.”

“You say *yeah* but then your arms get tighter! I’m fine, so just let go!”

“I don’t want to.”

“Whyyy...” Shion began to squirm, embarrassed at having cried.

But Sei persistently refused to release her. The tears may have ended, but the problem was still far from fixed. Sei decided she’d hold on to Shion like this until she was done saying everything she needed to say.

Shion sighed, seeming to realize it. “All right, fine,” she said, reluctantly relaxing. “Anyway... What are you trying to do?”

“There are things I still haven’t told you, Shion-kun. But I was running away from them. I’m sorry about how uncool that must have been. But I’ve made up my mind now.”

“Oh... Okay. What did you want to talk about?”

“Well, it’s just... It’s not that I didn’t *want* to rely on you for anything. I... I just couldn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you know. Because I’d end up *liking* you.”

“What’d you just say?! *Raaahhh!!!*”

“*Guphahahhhhhhh?!?*”

Shion let out a roar the likes of which Sei had never heard before, then let loose a mighty kick that connected directly with Sei’s crotch!!!

“A-Ahhh?! Oww! Oww! Owwwwww?!?”

“You’re the *worst*! This is important! Don’t fool around like that!!!”

“Oww! Oww! Oww! Oww!”

“Quit making weird noises and make excuses instead, dammit!!!”

“ ”

When the second of Shion’s megaton kicks landed on Sei’s vital spot, her vision went black! Unable to hold herself up, she fell into Shion, who now found herself supporting her.

“Mmmm?!?!?”

And at that moment, by some miracle, Sei’s lips gently met Shion’s, silencing her crazed yelling.

“...Ah!!! M-My apologies, Shion-kun, I just saw the Sanzu River right in front of me. And then I asked for details and—wait, what?”

“Oh, uh... You kissed me to comfort me? That was a pretty romantic thing to do...”

“What?”

“That was my first time, but... Eheh heh. Now what? Oh, jeez! Now I just don’t know what to do!”

“...Ahh. I see.”

By the time Sei had woken up, their lips had already parted. At first, she wasn’t sure what Shion was talking about, but after seeing her face right in front of her and gauging her reaction, she figured out what had taken place.

At the same time, she cursed God for not being able to feel the sensation of taking Shion’s first kiss, but she was certain that if she mentioned that, she’d definitely end up crossing the Sanzu River at a crawl.

Shion-kun, it looks like your first kiss went to a sexy actress VTuber who has always been a lesbian and whose mind has broken after getting kicked in the crotch. I’m really sorry. It’s not romantic—it’s a roman-kick. Like that, she groveled in her mind, but avoided mentioning any of it.

Fortunately, Shion’s anger seemed to have been quelled for the moment.

Maybe this was her only chance to go for it. Sei rallied herself, then grabbed Shion's shoulders to keep them both from running away and set a steady stare on her. "Shion-kun," she said.

"Yes?!"

"About what we were talking about. I wasn't joking—I was being serious."

"What we were talking about?"

"About liking you."

"Um, oh, right, that stuff! Wait, how is that a reason you wouldn't rely on me for things?"

"Well, that is..." Sei trailed off again. This reaction wasn't something she'd anticipated. "Umm, do you understand what I'm trying to say? When I say *like*, I mean the romantic kind. You know I'm all in on other girls as romantic partners, right?"

"Duh, since before your debut! I'm asking you to explain how that all connects to any of this!"

"Uhhh..." Finally, Sei started to feel *very* confused. She didn't understand. She just didn't understand. *How is this girl so... So...*

"If you like me, then you should rely on me! Liking me means you want to be with me, right? Then why would you push me away?!"

How is she so naturally accepting of this kind of friendliness from the same sex?! "Hang on a second!" begged Sei. "My head is literally spinning right now, so give me a second to sort through all this!"

"Hmm? Um, sure?"

Sei practically had a headache now—this situation didn't match any of what she'd learned or seen or experienced in her entire life. She broke down the conversation and decided to go through each thing at once.

"Okay, so first, there're two major reasons I was being so weirdly distant during this whole thing. The first was because I genuinely didn't want to cause anyone else trouble; like I explained to everyone, I was worried about this affecting them. And I don't really like showing weakness in the first place. And

the second thing is what I just said before—that if I get any closer to you, I’m liable to actually start having romantic feelings for you... Ahh, screw this. It’s getting really embarrassing trying to explain. Anyway, that’s the long and short of it.”

“Yeah, I got all that. What else?”

“What do you mean, what else?” repeated Sei, utterly baffled, unable to hide the pure astonishment on her face. “Do you *actually* understand what I’m saying now? I’m *saying* I might accidentally fall in love with you.”

“Ohh, yeah... Eheh heh. It’s kind of embarrassing to have you say such nice things so many times!”

“...Am I actually awake right now? I’ll try pinching myself in the nipple... Yep, hurts and feels good.”

“H-Hey, what the heck are you doing?!”

“Oh, sorry. I just wanted to make sure this is real life.”

“Don’t people usually pinch their *cheeks* for that?! Instead you’re talking about loving someone and then pinching your own nipple. It’s a little scary!”

“There! That’s it!” Hearing the thing she wanted to say buried within Shion’s tsukkomi, Sei reflexively interrupted. “You heard what I said, but you weren’t scared or put off by *that* part at all?”

“Huh? I mean, pinching your nipple in front of me is scary and off-putting.”

“No, I mean, separate from all that.”

“You mean about you coming to like me? Why would that scare me, coming from you?”

No matter how many times Sei repeated that in her head, she couldn’t sense any negative emotions from Shion’s tone of voice.

“At first I was mad because I thought you were joking, but I guess you were being serious. I mean, you did, um, just kiss me! Eheh heh!” Shion put her hand to her cheek and started squirming around, her expression one of rapture.

Despite having gotten her answer, Sei doubted even *more* that the moment

she was living in was actually real life. “I don’t get your reaction. It’s almost like... Like you’re *happy* about it.”

“Huh? Well, of course I’m happy you said you like me! Part of me was mad because I thought you hated me!”

Unable to hold it in any longer, Sei asked the question as directly as she could, in spite of all the fear she had for the answer—the fear that had been doggedly following her for so long. “...Does that mean you *like* me too? We’re both girls, you know.”

“Huh?”

“.....”

For a few moments, they stared silently at each other.

For Sei, it was suffocating, and the tension and nervousness showed on her face. As for Shion, she basically had a big question mark on her face for a while, until suddenly—

“Wait, we’re both girls?!?!” she cried, like a scientist making the discovery of the century.

“You... You mean you didn’t notice until now?!”

“Yeah, I just realized it...”

“That’s like the most important part!”

“L-Look! I’m having to deal with all of Live-On’s clowns day in and day out, so at this point it’ll take a lot more than that to surprise me!”

“I mean, I guess all the Livers I’ve come into contact with—all women—are ones who want to propose not only romance but outright sex to me, or ones who want to become a mommy to all the other ones, but still!”

“A-Awayuki-chan is one thing, but I’m not that weird!”

“You? Not weird? If we lived in a world where you weren’t weird, there would be more nurseries than convenience stores. No age limit either—anyone’s welcome if they want to be a baby.”

“Ugh. To think I’d been so violated by the Live-On environment without

realizing it...”

The environments people were raised in, and the times themselves—and all their ethical perspectives and common sensibilities—were always changing. The rules people followed were all ultimately rules created *by* people. Live-On had a lot of especially crazy people in it, and they’d made their own, unique utopia, cut off from the rest of the world.

No, no, wait. Rolling with the punches a little too much, there...

Seeing how high Shion’s Live-On affinity was, Sei finally began to doubt her own position as possibly being actually a commonsense one, compared to everyone else.

“But I guess we are both girls, huh...” continued Shion. “It happens in fiction, but it’s still kind of rare in society...”

Sei sighed, then brought the topic back around. “Do you finally get it now?” Whether that sigh was frustration at Shion, reverence toward Live-On, or perhaps a moment’s hope blinking in the back of her mind—

“Anyway, yeah,” Sei said. “You get it now. The LGBT liberation movement is spreading, but most people still get freaked out when they end up on the receiving end of feelings like these from someone of the same sex. I know that pretty well from experience.”

“I see. Both girls... Awawawa... Wait, then that means I like... I like...”

Sei continued her monologue as Shion started to look down and mumble to herself. “I used to be even more standoffish in the past. I didn’t like dealing with other people very much. But ever since joining Live-On... You kind of barged in through my door, and I started actually talking to people more. It was a place that would accept me, and I was honestly having a lot of fun. But... I was the one with the problem. I started to realize while doing things with everyone that I was starting to venture beyond just friendship with you.”

Shion mumbled again, then yelped a little.

“But we can’t go any further than this. If I had accepted your help during all this... I definitely would have fallen for you. That’s basically why I’ve been so weird about dealing with the whole thing.”

“Hohhh! Hohhh!”

“So I... Wait, Shion-kun, are you listening?”

Shion had begun to fidget restlessly, head still down. Every so often, she'd let out a yelp or a whimper or something, like she couldn't endure it anymore. Sei was confused; it didn't exactly match up with what she was saying.

“...Um. Yeah. Right, yeah. Wait. What? Oh, sorry! I wasn't really listening!”

“Huh?!” Sei cried, the most surprised she'd been in this series of surprises.

“Umm, what were you saying?”

“...! Fine, never mind!” spat Sei, turning away. Naturally, the words were filled with anger at Shion for not listening to her trying to be serious.

But—Shion, for her part, had been having a very important conversation of her own with herself. And she'd finally come to an answer.

“So in conclusion,” continued Sei, “I'd like to keep a certain distance between us moving forward!”

“Huh...?”

“And not just with you. I want to keep everyone else at a certain distance too, in order to make sure the same thing doesn't happen again. For all my fans, I have to protect my status as Sei Utsuki, the VTuber. I can't put my position at Live-On in jeopardy for personal reasons.”

“Hey, wait a—”

“I really didn't want to have to tell anyone about this. I didn't want anyone to hate me, despite who I am. Especially not you. But then I hurt you by not telling you, so I gathered up my courage and said it. I hope you can respect my courage, and even if you hate the real-life me, you'll continue to work with Sei Utsuki without being unfriendly.”

“Um... That isn't...” Shion stammered, clearly confused at Sei trying to give up. Shion had realized her own feelings during her conversation with herself. She really didn't want Sei to end their talk like this. “R-Right! I love you too, Seisama!”

“Hm? Aha ha. Thanks. In that case, I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t avoid me too obviously.”

“No, I mean, not that, I... When you said you’d come to like me, even after I realized we were both girls, um, I didn’t hate that at all! I was actually happy about it!”

“R-Really? Hey, you don’t have to butter me up. No need to be overly thoughtful.”

“I-I-I-I’m not buttering you up! A-Also, when you kissed me before! My heart was going crazy, you know! There wasn’t any loathing in there! My heart was pounding so much I thought it might stop, and I got worried about my lips being dry, and I was just so happy I couldn’t even think about anything past that!!!”

“Sh-Shion-kun? Do you understand what you’re saying? Also, I didn’t feel what it—er, never mind.”

“I get it! I know! But I’m saying it anyway! A-Also, I like your face! It was good when you first talked to me too, if I’m being honest! Um, and also, I’m pretty calm about doing collabs and stuff with you, but I actually really like your dirty jokes! I laugh at them a lot off stream!”

“Oh... I-Is that right? Thanks?”

“But more importantly!”

“?!”

Originally, it was supposed to be Sei comforting Shion as she sat disheartened in the corner. At some point, though, Sei started to feel herself pushed back by a strange pressure coming from Shion, and ended up in that corner herself. Then Shion did a kabe-don with both arms, clearly not willing to let Sei leave, creating the exact opposite situation as before.

Even though Shion was taking the offensive in a very picturesque way, surprisingly, she’d just let her emotions do it for her—she’d abandoned all thought. If she’d witnessed this scene from a few feet away, she wouldn’t have even known what she was doing. Her mind was spinning.

This was all for the one she loved. She didn’t care how embarrassing it was, or

how poorly she could form words right now—if she wasn't totally up-front about telling Sei her feelings, it would hurt her massively. So she made up her mind.

“You love me, don't you?! Then what are you doing trying to give up right at the starting line?!”

“Love? No, I meant that I might fall for you, that's all—”

“That's the same thing! It's too late! And if you love me, then win me over!”

“What?! You'd *want* me to try and win you over?! It's not off-putting for you?!”

“Nobody ever said it was! I was really, really happy!”

“But that's... But, but—”

“No buts! What, are you going to back out of this after coming so far?! Because if you do, then you don't like me like you said you do!”

“What?! No, it's *because* I like you so much that I'm worrying about it!!!”

“Why don't we just go out, then?! Do you have it in you to go out with me?!”

“Yeah, I can do it! Requited love? Of course I'd go out with you, you nitwit!!!”

“Then I guess we're a couple now!!! So you better get yourself ready for that!!!”

“You've got some nerve, you know that?! I'm going to suck you down to your bone marrow, so prepare...yourself...?”

.....

“Aaaaaahhhhhhh?!?!” they both screamed.

With Sei responding to Shion's energy in kind, this time, they simply threw their true feelings at one another, regardless of society or the past or any of that. And now that those feelings were out, they started to calm down—only to finally realize what it was they'd just been saying and cringe at their own awkward, teen romance movie-like displays of youth...

“Umm. Hey, I'm, umm, sorry, I guess.”

“What are you apologizing for, Shion-kun? I should be the one saying sorry.”

“No, it’s just... Aha ha. I don’t know either.”

When their embarrassment had faded somewhat, but their faces were still indescribably hot, the two of them took a seat side by side on the stairs, calmed down, and started talking again.

“So, Shion-kun, we’re, uh... We’re dating now, right?”

“Y-Yeah, I guess so!”

“So that means that...you like girls, right?”

“Huh? Oh... I don’t really get it, I guess. It might sound weird from how old I am, but I haven’t really had any experience with romantic feelings before now. Still, though...”

Shion paused, bringing her gaze—which she’d been averting in embarrassment—over to look straight into Sei’s eyes before continuing. And the words she now spoke were the true feelings that Shion wanted to tell Sei the most, but they’d felt somehow abstract before. This time, now that she was calm, they could take form.

“I love you because I love you. Who needs more of a reason than that?”

Sei sucked in her breath.

“And it’s not just about ‘love’ in the sense of romance either. There’re people who love VTubers or books or things nobody else understands. But I love you no matter who would deny it, and that’s all that matters. If we’re not breaking any laws or bothering anyone else, nobody else has a right to complain.”

...Ahh...

And then Sei slowly let out that breath, along with the tension in her body.

I think I was drawn to you because, deep down somewhere, I knew you would think that way.

Sei leaned over, practically falling into Shion and embracing her.

“Oohhhhhh wh-wh-wh-wha-what’s wrong?!”

“Nothing. It’s just that you’re right. It’s not that I *might* fall in love with you—I

really *do* love you. Is that okay?”

“O-O-O-O-Of course it’s okay! I was just surprised!”

Sei saw the other girl start to panic, her face all red, and grinned. This was how the one calling herself everyone’s mama *should* be. And she was surprised at herself too, for how naturally she was able to smile. The last time she’d *really* smiled had been before her monetization had been revoked.

Apparently this all has been affecting me a lot more than I thought it was, she thought. My streams lately haven’t been that great, and I can see it. I’ll have to make a good recovery from now on.

“Oh.”

But as the words “from now on” came to mind, ironically, she realized another problem.

“Hm? What’s wrong?” asked Shion.

“Er, I was just thinking about what we should do about streaming. Should we go public with our relationship?”

“Why wouldn’t we? Oh, wait. Are you worried about criticism? We’re already the standard ship in Live-On, you know.”

“Well, yeah, but... I have the Sei Utsuki character, you know? If we just make it all public, I feel like her character will kind of get distorted.”

“I don’t think that will happen.”

Just as Sei was once again beginning to doubt her decision, Shion once again brushed away the approaching shadows.

“You’re both Sei Utsuki the character *and* Sei Utsuki the human, aren’t you? That’s one of the charms that only VTubers have. They change over time, grow, and sometimes make mistakes. They feel so alive that viewers will encourage you, and cheer for you, and be on your side. So!”

Shion quickly got to her feet.

“Don’t pretend to be Sei Utsuki—just *be* her!”

And then she held out a hand to Sei.

“And besides!” she continued. “I came to Live-On because I wanted to throw away my stability and reliability to walk my own path! So come with me!”

“.....”

That isn't fair, thought Sei. How am I supposed to say no when you have that kind of look on your face?

But she didn't have a reason to refuse at this point. Shion had beautifully put together all the scattered pieces of the puzzle of her heart.

She wouldn't hesitate. She wouldn't be afraid. She'd just keep taking those steps forward.

“...Right! I want to keep on living with you—and everyone else!”

What began as a pair of awkwardly clasped hands that could come apart at any moment finally tightened up, binding them together...



Awayuki here. Repeat, Awayuki here. I'm currently trembling with the worst case of bloodlust I've ever had.

You see, after Shion-senpai and Sei-sama left the room, Nekoma-senpai and I also left, not wanting to bother them anymore.

But ever since then, my heart's been beating kind of fast. What's going on? I doubt it would happen, but I hope Sei-sama didn't ruin the situation by shooting off a bunch of dirty jokes and getting kicked in the crotch and dying. That's a weird way to worry about her, but I'm worried nonetheless.

And you know what happened next? That night, they were streaming together, and then on Cheeper they came out and said something, you know?

In haste, I jumped over to their stream, right? They reported their monetization would be coming back soon, and Sei-sama explained everything, including how she felt, right? And then a moment later, the two of them started talking to each other like lovers and flirting and what the heck is going on, I ask you? What, are they now a couple, is that it, what's going on on on on on on?

Wait, are they for real? What's Sei-sama doing winning Shion-senpai's heart like that? Wait, this is all so sudden, am I not understanding something something SOMETHING???

"Yeah, so that's the story, ladies and gents. Now that you know what's going on beneath the surface with me, some of you might think I'm pathetic or not the person you imagined. But it's who I am. Not just someone who loves dirty jokes and girls—I have this side of me too. Kinda emo, huh? Don't you think so, 'Shion'?" Sei said, without any honorifics.

"Eheh heh, being human is pretty important, huh? 'Sei' may now be both my child and my girlfriend, but we'll both still do our best to make Live-On even more exciting for you all!"

"Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!!!!" they both laughed.

"SHUT UUUUUUUPPPP!!!!!"

The three of us on our voice call—Hareru-senpai, Nekoma-senpai, and I—all shouted at the same time, and we saw the chat fill up with equally

heartwarming curses like that.

...And when Sei-sama and Shion-senpai smiled upon seeing them, they looked for all the world like girls who truly shine—just like Live-On always called its members.



Epilogue

“Hello!”

“Oh, Awayuki-chan is here!”

“Yo, Awa-chan. We’ve been waiting.”

One day, off stream, I hopped into a voice call with Hikari-chan and Mashiron. It was a little earlier than when we’d planned to meet, but the two of them seemed to have nothing else to do, so they’d been passing the time chatting. It happened a lot with the third generation.

“I guess we’re just waiting for Chami-chan now?” I asked.

“Yep,” replied Mashiron. “She didn’t say she’d be late, so she should be here in a moment.”

“Umm, hello?”

“Hey, there she is!” exclaimed Hikari-chan. “The final piece of the puzzle, right on cue! So cool!”

She was right. Chami-chan had entered the call exactly as we’d started talking about her, almost as if she’d heard us.

Chami-chan giggled a little. “I actually noticed right away when Hikari-chan and Mashiro-chan came into the call.”

“Wait, you did?” I asked. “Why didn’t you join them? Were you busy?”

“No, I just started thinking how bad it would feel if I joined and then they had to stop their conversation. When you went in, Awayuki-chan, I knew it was my chance!”

“Then you really *were* aiming for that moment! You never grow out of that scaredy-cat nature of yours, huh? We’re genmates, remember? We’ve been together for so long already!”

The other three girls all started laughing—partly because of how funny

Chami-chan was acting, but there was another reason too. And I, the one who'd made the comment, caught on to it and joined the circle of laughter.

"Heh heh," Mashiron chuckled. "Been together for so long, huh? You knew exactly the comment to make in this situation. I expected nothing less!"

"Are you getting better at your witty retorts?" asked Chami-chan. "I couldn't help but burst out laughing, even though I was the target."

"No, that was totally an accident!" I insisted. "But I guess saying that by accident might make it even more perfect, considering the situation..."

Hikari-chan laughed. "Well, you set the mood! Why don't we get started?"

With everyone's agreement, I took a deep breath, then read the topic of today's agenda out loud to everyone: "Without further ado, let's start our Meeting to Decide What to Do For the Third Gen's First Anniversary!!!"

Afterword

Thank you for purchasing the fourth volume of *VTuber Legend: How I Went Viral After Forgetting to Turn Off My Stream*, or just *VTuber Legend* for short. I'm the author. Nana Nanato.

While Sei sort of took center stage, casting suspicion on this volume for having the highest density of dirty jokes ever in the series, did you enjoy it? The cover, by the way, takes place after the story in the book, during a stream where Sei gets interrogated by Shuwa.

In terms of what stood out this time, it was probably the yuri element. It was always a bit of spice I wanted to add into this mainly comedy series, but I really kind of went for it in Volume 4. In that sense, this book might feel somewhat different from the others.

Another notable element was the second generation's activities. Sei ended up being the main focus of Volume 4, but to be fair, I wrote this one meaning for it to be a story of *all* the second-genners, not just her.

I hope you'll all continue to support the girls who were around during the dawn of Live-On.

Additionally, aside from smaller additions and corrections to the web version, the ending had a somewhat large change made to it. I think it's easier to read as a full novel this way, and I like how it turned out, but just remember that both versions are *VTuber Legend*.

To go into a little more detail, for the sake of pacing, I left part of the events leading to the return of Sei's monetization up to Hareru's all-powerful skills, which makes me want to write a side story about how she solved everything.

In any case, the series will be continuing! Volume 5 will be all about the third generation. Like the epilogue mentioned, they're on the cusp of their first anniversary. As always, it'll be a crazy, incoherent story that I hope will put a smile on everyone's faces.

To wrap this afterword up, I'd like to sincerely thank everyone involved in producing this fourth book, as well as all the readers who have been supporting me.

Thank you again for Volume 4! Let's meet again in Volume 5.

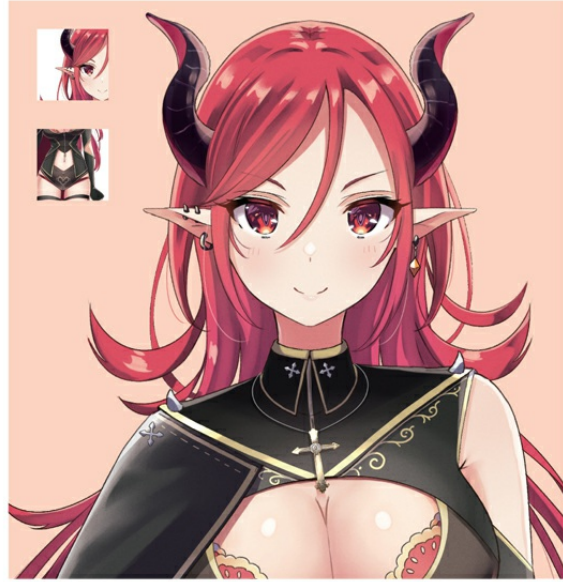
Oh, and that SEGA story from the Castella chapter? Mostly a true story.



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An energetic high school girl who loves putting smiles on everyone's faces. Extremely curious and—carried by her momentum—frequently does or says things that nobody would have ever expected.



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"Hey, ladies and gents! It's your girl, Sei-sama!"

In her past life, she was a succubus who lived off the vigor of men, but died of starvation since she only ever showed interest in other women. She reincarnated, bringing us to today. Her horns are a holdover from that past life.



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"Kon-miko, everyone! It's everyone's mama, Shion Kaminari!"

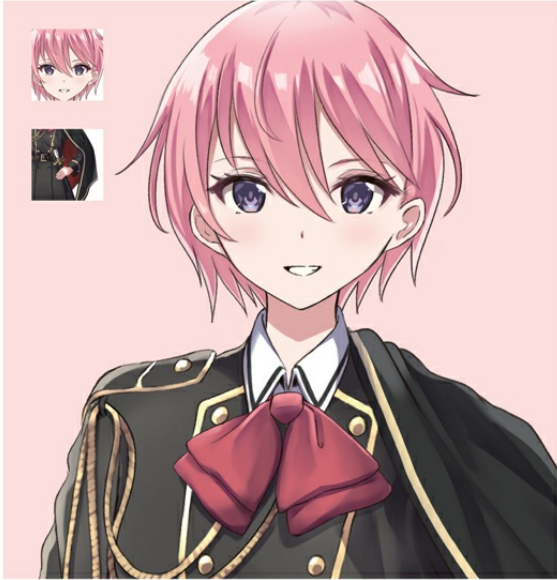
A shrine maiden whose body is inhabited by a nine-tailed fox and who safeguards the people as a servant of the kami. Because of how fiercely her nine fluffy tails swing around based on her emotions, caution is needed when standing behind her.



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"Nya-nyan! I caught a whiff of something great and came running!"

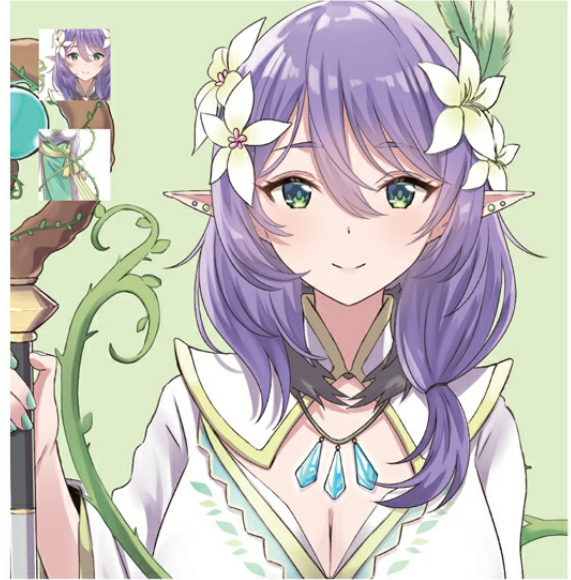
A beast girl with heterochromia who loves naps—but whenever she sees someone close by eating food, she immediately gets up and goes over to them with sparkling eyes. She'll be happy if you give her something. She'll also be happy if you pet her, even if you don't give her anything.



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A member of the Resistance, an idol group focused on self-liberation. Her cool looks make her popular with men and women alike, but inside she's somewhat incompetent, so she works hard to protect her image.



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An elven zookeeper at Ehrai Zoo, a major theme park featuring every animal under the sun. Respected to the point of complete obedience by all the animals there, for some reason.



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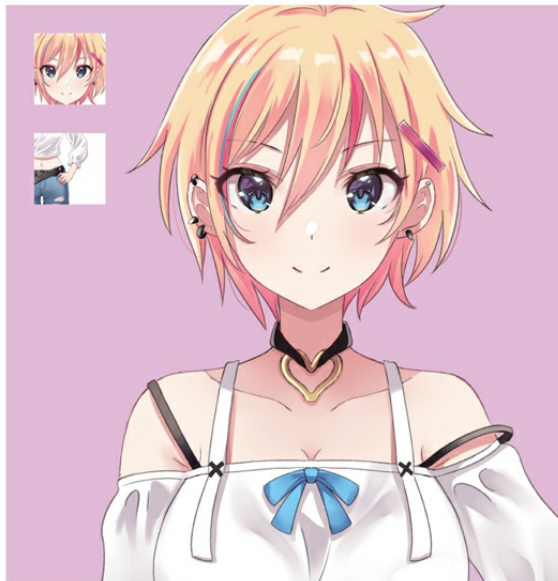
A mysterious beauty who only appears on days when a light snow is falling. Her purple eyes draw you in with the promise of something hidden deep inside them...



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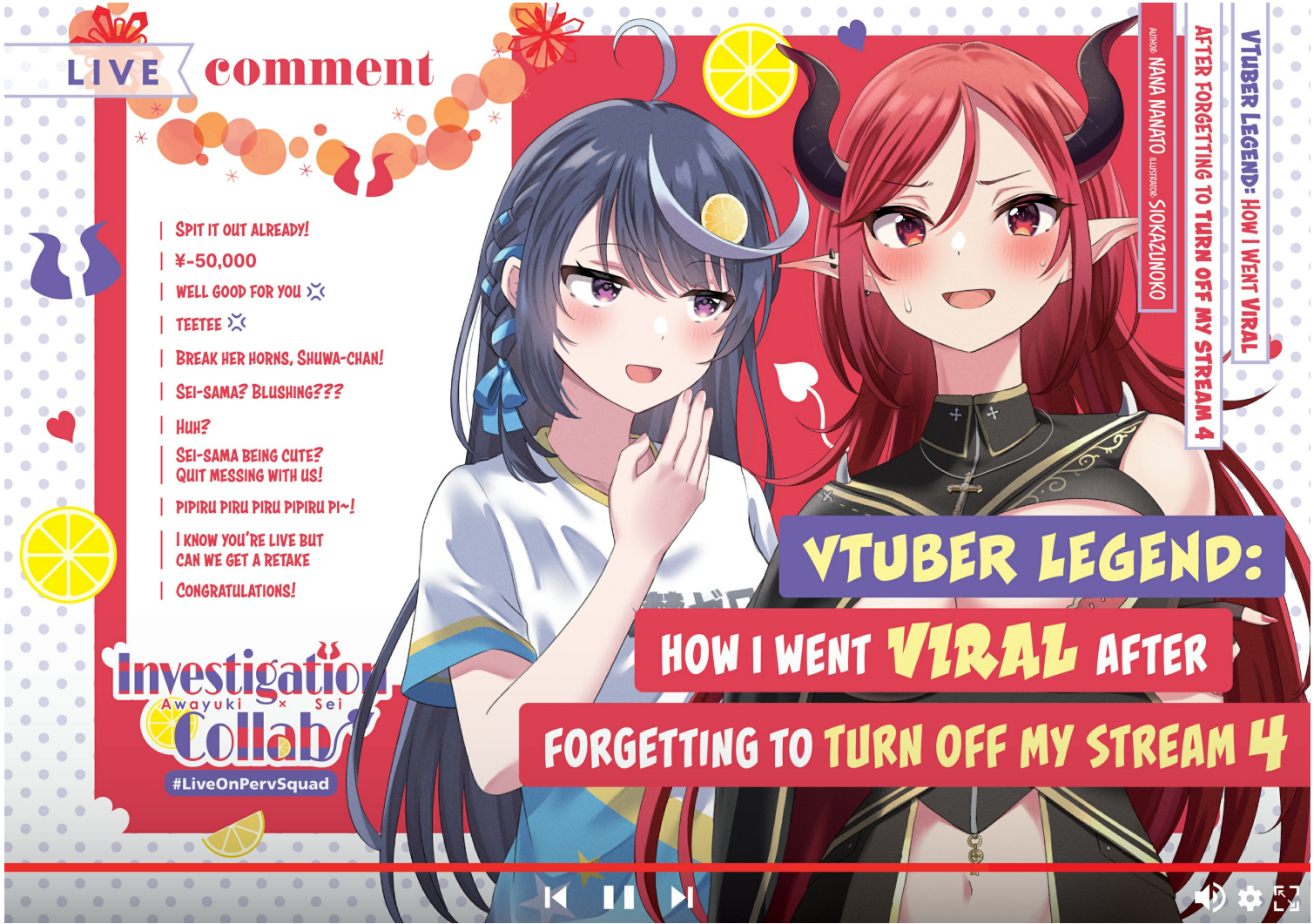
A festival girl who appears at festivals throughout Japan. Some say she's even appeared at the same time in two different festivals held in separate places.



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Originally a gloomy character, but rallied her courage and debuted as a sunny one—to thunderous applause. Inside, though, she hasn't changed, making her a gloomy character wearing the skin of a sunny one.



LIVE comment

- | SPIT IT OUT ALREADY!
- | ¥-50,000
- | WELL GOOD FOR YOU ☆
- | TEETEE ☆
- | BREAK HER HORNS, SHUWA-CHAN!
- | SEI-SAMA? BLUSHING???
- | HUH?
- | SEI-SAMA BEING CUTE?
- | QUIT MESSING WITH US!
- | PIPIRU PIRU PIRU PIPIRU PI~!
- | I KNOW YOU'RE LIVE BUT
- | CAN WE GET A RETAKE
- | CONGRATULATIONS!

Investigation
Awayuki x Sei
Collab
#LiveOnPervSquad

Author: NANA NAMATO
Illustrator: SIOKAZUOKO

VTUBER LEGEND: HOW I WENT VIRAL
AFTER FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 4

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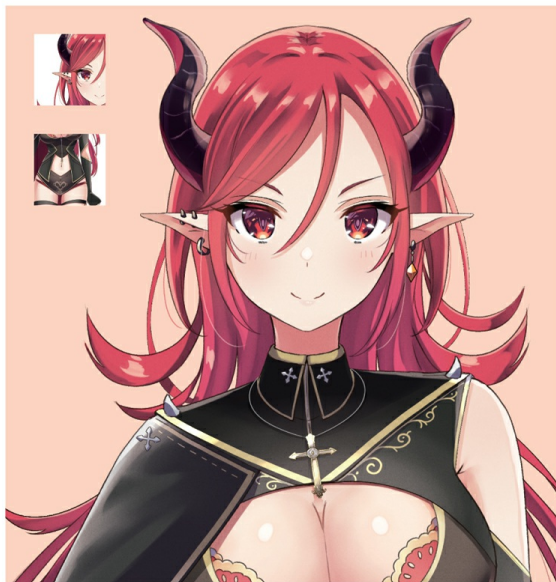




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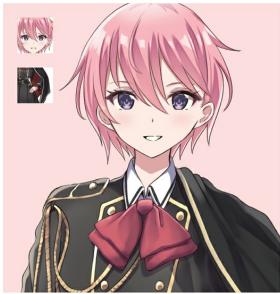
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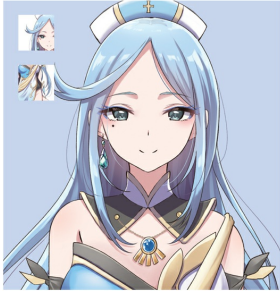
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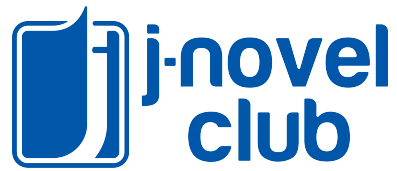
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VTuber Legend: How I Went Viral after Forgetting to Turn Off My Stream
Volume 4

by Nana Nanato

Translated by Alice Prowse Edited by Alexandra Fresch

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